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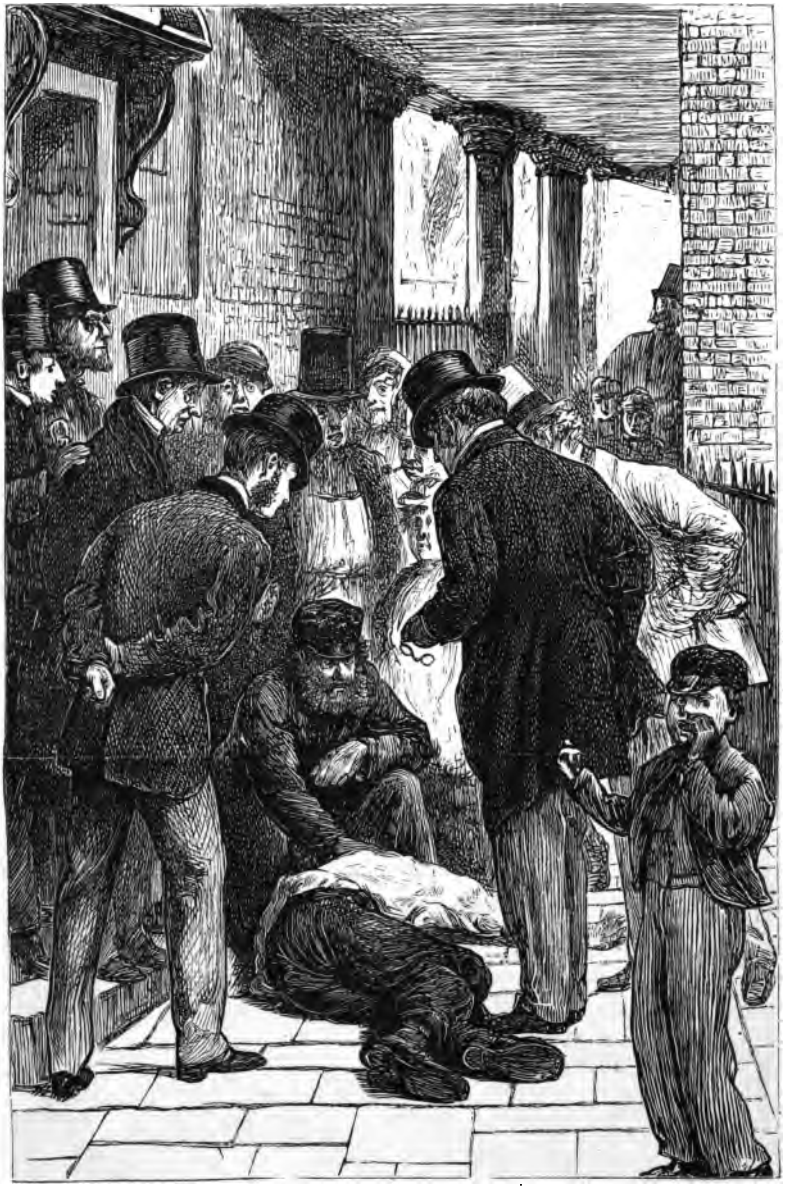

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1868.

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HENRY O'NEIL, JAMES CHRISTIE,

AND

ARTHUR LEWIS,

I Inscribe this Tale,

WHICH WAS PLANNED IN THE "HIGHLAND HOME" OF OUR FRIEND

JOHN PHILLIP.

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PREFACE.

A PREFACE is a pleasant thing to write, whatever it may be to read, and the author of this story ventures, as on former occasions, to say a few words which, though they introduce his book, have something of retrospection.

To those who have accepted the tale in its monthly installments it is due to say that it was originally intended to occupy fourteen numbers only, but that the author did not hesitate between the alternatives of excluding from his picture some features which he thought desirable, and of venturing on a small extension of his canvas.

During the progress of the story the author has been favored with a great number of private communications, for the most part anonymous, in reference to various portions of the work. A few of the letters have been couched in a language which precludes them from any kind of notice, but these amenities of criticism have been repaid tenfold by information to the effect that the author has given much gratification to a number of persons whom he is happy to have pleased. These two acknowledgments it would hardly have been necessary to make, as they do but refer to the ordinary incidents of periodical authorcraft. But he would add a word to some private critics of a different kind.

Exception has been taken to the introduction of certain incidents and characters, to which he will not directly point, and he has also been accused of unfriendliness to what is not improperly called the religious world.

In the exercise of that judgment which must be permitted even to an author —that person whom, in common with the painter, every intellect deems itself qualified and authorized to teach—he selected a series of incidents which could not be brought about by the agency of the virtuous. The greatest of our satirists has said that it would be unadvisable, in England, to give a truthful account of the life of a young Englishman. The writer has not sought to do in any fullness that which Thackeray has asserted should not be done, but both in regard to the young Englishman whose marriage is the turning-point of the story, and to many of the subordinate personages, he has eschewed the mockery of escaping into generalities which mean nothing to those who are unacquainted with evil, and which are laughed at by those who are less fortunate. There are several bad persons in this story, but though the author disclaims any idea of composing a book on the principle of virtue being rewarded and vice punished, it will be seen that departure from morality has conducted each person in his or her degree to the end which—in the absence of repentance and reformation—it is orthodox to prepare for the evil-doer. In no case has the author defended the vicious, or committed the more dangerous and despicable offense of encouraging vice by portraying it as successful. He is not quite sure indeed

whether he ought not to take still higher ground, and to claim praise for having relied, in these passionate days, upon interest not arising from a breach of the commandments which refer to conjugal relations.

In the matter of the second animadversion he has received letters of a kind which entitle the writers to respectful consideration, but he will only say that they have been written for the most part without sufficient attention to the entire bearing of the work, and, notably, without regard to the character in which is embodied the best form of religion which the author can typify.

To these "notices to correspondents," which will probably not appear in any subsequent edition of the work, the author will only add that if he makes no formal acknowledgment of the continuous kindness which his serial has received from his fellow-craftsman of the critical press, it is not that he is not as sensible as ever of that kindness, but because he is so constantly working among them, and answering and being answered by them from other platforms, that the dropping into conventional phrase here would seem to place him among those social felons who rise at a feast and must be allowed to say a few words for which their hearers wish them in Tophet.

His other friends, the public, have given this book so warm a welcome, that it would be ungrateful not to acknowledge the fact, or not to regard it as an invitation.

KENT TERRACE, REGENT'S PARK,
Christmas, 1867.

SOONER OR LATER.

CHAPTER I.

ANDREW BARTON.

On the Holborn side of the great legal quadrilateral which adjoins the gardens dear to us from memories of dear old Sir Roger de Coverley, is a smaller square, three sides of which are composed of houses let in sets of chambers, chiefly to lawyers, the fourth and northern side being occupied by the hall and other buildings belonging to the Inn. This square is a quiet little bay lying close to one of the great, roaring, rushing rivers of London life, and would be almost noiseless but that human vessels in quest of legal pilots are constantly putting in through the narrow channel that leads into the busy river. Separated from the Inn by a squalid and dirty lane on the east lies in festering wretchedness and wickedness one of the worst districts of the metropolis, while on the west an intermixture of old-fashioned and decorous streets, and a few of exceeding uncleanliness and poverty, interpose between the Inn and the regions of civilization. Such landmarks may not now be useless to the reader whose London is in the Court Directory, and some years later may be convenient to an adventurer who shall leave the railways of the day, and explore the districts whence traffic shall have departed, on the invitation of steam or of its successor.

One hot afternoon in early August, when the minds of the legal gentlemen of the Inn were excited, if not softened, by the approach of their holidays, a small crowd had hastily gathered round the doorway of one of the houses in the square.

A workman, apparently a tiler, had fallen from the parapet of the house, and lay upon the stone pavement.

The five or six persons who were in the square at the moment hurried up, and from the house itself, and from chambers where those near the windows had observed either the accident or the rush to the spot, came solicitors, clerks of various grades, boys, clients, and stragglers.

Those who were nearest turned away, shocked and pale, and pushed out of the little crowd, while others took their places. No one, however, cared to touch the man.

He did not move a limb. He had fallen in a heap, and some grizzled hair under an old blue cap and the brown skin at the back of his neck were all that could be seen of his head. One arm was under him, the other, thrust out as if he had sought to break the fearful fall, lay straight on the flag.

A white-aproned porter forced his way through the throng, touching his hat, even at that moment, to two or three gentlemen past whom he pressed.

"It's Andrew Barton," he said, after a moment's look at the poor fellow. "But I don't know what call he had to be here," added the porter. "He had a job at the corner, I know."

"Never mind that now, Parker," said one of the gentlemen. "Get the police and a stretcher, and have him moved to the hospital."

"One might do more harm than good by touching him," said a quiet, elderly clerk, not quite easy at doing nothing, and yet very willing to have an excuse for avoiding the ghastly sight which must be presented by turning the man round.

"There's not much harm to be done after a fall of four stories," said a very well-dressed young gentleman who was serving his articles; "but we'll see."

Mr. Farquhar piqued himself upon his nerve, and liked, or said he liked, to be taken by medical students to see operations. He advanced to move the man, and there was a sensation in the crowd, some of the foremost hastily drawing backward.

The young lawyer had his hand on the side of the fallen man, when there was a cry:

"Stop, stop, better let the doctor do it!"

Perhaps not altogether displeased, Mr. Farquhar drew back, and made way for the person thus described, who had been fetched from a neighboring street.

He was a middle-aged man, somewhat too stout for his height, but rather handsome, and with features which would have been pleasing but for their discouraged and discontented expression. His full brown whiskers and beard curled well, and his blue-gray eyes were good, but lacked brightness. Carelessly dressed, and wearing an intolerably non-professional cap, he jerked himself at the work to which he was called instead of approaching it with the calm but rapid movement which marks the practiced healer of men.

"Here he is, Mr. Dudley," said the porter who had mentioned the name of the unfortunate man.

"I can see that," said Mr. Dudley, rudely. "Am I to come any nearer?" he added, stopping in his walk.

Ample room was made round him, and nobody seemed to see the necessity for his thus instantly proceeding to make himself disagreeable; but his doing so did not diminish him in the eyes of many of the crowd. He then condescended to advance to the body, and to kneel on one knee that he might examine it the better. Then the by-standers closed round him at their peril.

"Is there life?" a voice ventured to inquire.

Mr. Dudley looked up with enough rage in his face to imply that he could have saved the victim but for the wicked interference and interruption.

"Who asks?" he said, savagely.

It was the elderly clerk who had spoken, but for a moment he was actually deterred from acknowledging it. But Mr. Dudley glared round for his answer, and the elderly clerk plucked up his spirit, and was about to speak.

"Is it a fatal case?"

The words were given in no humble tone this time, and Mr. Dudley instantly recognized two facts—first, that a new speaker was present; and secondly, that he heard a voice whose owner had confronted him, by no means to his comfort, at a certain criminal trial some months previously. The great advocate, Sergeant Penguin, had joined the crowd, and had saved the elderly clerk from the storm that would have descended on him when Mr. Dudley, quitting his examination, arose to his feet in wrath. The storm was stayed—it was not upon Mr. Sergeant Penguin that Mr. Dudley, however angry, was inclined to discharge it. But he was resolute on insulting somebody.

"If idiotic people would have the sense to stand back," said Mr. Dudley, "I could tell you, Mr. Sergeant. Perhaps you may have influence enough to get them to do so. Ah! here are the police."

In two minutes more the body of Andrew Barton was being borne from the square, Mr. Dudley having made, or affected to make, a brief examination, after which he had laid a cloth over the head of the poor fellow. He did not, however, deem it wise to affront the last speaker, and edging near him, said:

"It is of no use, but they may take him to my surgery."

"Makes a paragraph, Mr. Dudley, eh?" said the sergeant, quietly.

He let the crowd disperse, the superior part of it resolving itself once more into professional life, the rest forming an escort ready to follow the body to Mr. Dudley's, or any where else, as permitted by the happy otiosity enjoyed by the million. The lawyer scanned the front of the house from whose top the man had fallen. There was, however, nothing to distinguish it from its neighbors. One of the windows above the parapet was open, as was natural in such weather. There were no signs of a laborer's having been at work there, but the careful eye of the observer detected on the coping, at some distance, the handle of a tool, and some newly-laid mortar round a single tile. Of course his act of accusation was ready at a moment's notice.

"Those fellows never fall when at their lawful work. He had been taking a round of observation, of course, a snapping up of unconsidered trifles" (the sergeant was capital at Shakspearian quotation, having professed acting in earlier life, though he acted far better before a jury than ever before an audience), "and our unfortunate Autolycus came to grief. He got in at that window, probably annexed something which friend Dudley will find upon him, and will or will not produce as circumstances may dictate, heard the proprietor's latch-key in the door, made too hasty a retreat, and fell over. Who lies i' the second chamber?"

He went to the doorway, and putting up his gold eye-glass read the names there painted.

"'Wimperley and Blamper,' ground floor: most respectable," said the sergeant, who had a way of talking to himself—sometimes, it was imgined, when somebody was sure to hear him. "First floor, 'Mr. Gerald Kildare:' very rising man indeed; good family. Second floor, 'Orbit and Wheeler:' celebrated engineers; most celebrated, saw a wonderful plan of theirs at the Society of Arts—couldn't understand an infernal line of it," interpolated the great lawyer, frankly. "Top floor, 'Mr. Percy Vaughan.' Don't know any thing about him, but he is the person whom the poor fellow yonder came to plunder, and has died for coming. 'For worms, brave Percy.' If he has lost a watch or any such trifle he had better inquire of friend Dudley."

"Very shocking thing, Sir," said the porter, who had known the sergeant before his promotion, and as a sojourner in the Inn. He had lingered at a respectful distance, but came up as the gold eye-glass fell again.

"A shocking thing indeed, Parker," said the sergeant, with his pleasantly rolling utterance. "A very shocking thing, Parker. You knew the man well, you said, Parker?"

The porter had said nothing of the kind, but the sergeant had a habit of assuming admissions.

"No, Sir, I know very little about him, except that he has done odd jobs about for a year or more."

"His name I thought you mentioned—Barling, or something—I have such a way of forgetting names."

He never forgot one, and having heard this, knew it as well as the porter did.

"Andrew Barton, Sir."

"Married?—children?—I hope not, Parker."

"Yes, Sir, but a bad lot, I doubt. At least I have seen his wife when she has come to bring his dinner now and then, and I don't know that I ever see her without a black eye."

"Hm! Bad. But she's had the last of her black eyes now, unless she marries again. Something must be done for her, I suppose? If you hear of any thing of the sort going on my clerk will give you a sovereign."

"I'm sure you're very good, Sir."

"We must help our fellow-creatures in misfortune, you know, Parker—that's the golden rule."

And the sergeant went off to Sergeants' Inn, to consider how he could best help a fellow-creature who had had the misfortune to be discovered in the act of burglary.

Meantime the police conveyed the body of Andrew Barton to the residence of Mr. Dudley. It was in one of the small streets which, as has been said, are mixed up with the old-fashioned and respectable dwelling-places west of the Inn. Mr. Dudley had a shop, whereat could be procured not only the means, more or less adulterate, of curing the frame when sick, but where, with a noble forethought, he also supplied, in the form of sanatory applications, what is better than cure—namely, prevention. Cleanliness, which we all know has so very distinguished a neighbor next to it on one side, has on the other a neighbor only second in the estimation of the wise, namely, healthiness, and Mr. Dudley sold soap. He performed certain operations in dentistry; but care renders such things needless, and Mr. Dudley disinterestedly sold the appliances the neglect whereof makes the dentist rich. Aware, too, that health is much promoted by attention to personal appearance, Mr. Dudley did not hesitate to sell the oil that maketh the servant-maid's hair to shine, nor did he disdain to increase her attractions by the addition of scent for her stubborn cambric kerchief. Of the more elevated portion of his professional practice it will be the less necessary to speak, for a reason which will shortly appear; but it may be added that Mr. Dudley had a large-minded confidence in the constituted authorities, and would sell any remedy to which Government (after the earnest and conscientious investigation by its special officer which precedes the sending out a medicine accredited by the Sovereign) lent its stamp, and that he extended the same large confidence to mankind in general, implicitly relying upon the statement of any customer that the deleterious or poisonous drug he or she required was wanted for the most innocent, nay, laudable, of purposes. So good a man should have succeeded: but a good man struggling with difficulties is said to be a sight the gods love; and their good-nature had been indulged in the case of Mr. Dudley, who, up to the time of which we are speaking, had been needy while he confined himself to everyday practice, and had, whenever he ventured on a *coup*, come into unpleasant contact with some minion of the law. But the gods were growing tired of their favorite sight.

"It is Mr. Dudley's way," he used to say, "never to throw away a chance;" and perhaps it is found, in this curious world, that men who are so fond of hoarding chances often squander certainties. At all events, those who have gained the best stakes at the play-table of life are thought to have done it by minding, steadily, the game itself, and have done little in the way of two-penny betting with by-standers, or even of picking up coins accidentally dropped. But Mr. Dudley took his own course, and adhered to it with a perseverance which merited reward. The outspoken sergeant had hit the mark when he alluded to a paragraph as Mr. Dudley's object in having the body removed to his own surgery. It was a point in his little game of life to procure such an advertisement. The accident would be recorded in the papers. The public around Mr. Dudley would be reminded of the existence of an accomplished practitioner, who instantly hurried to the spot, and with his habitual humanity and promptness caused the unfortunate man to be conveyed to the surgery, No. 17 Lancaster Street, Holborn, where every resource of science was brought to bear upon a case which, however, was hopeless; but it was a consolation to his bereaved friends to know that even a Ferguson or a Thompson (it was something to get the words Ferguson, Thompson, and Dudley into the same paragraph) could have done no more than was done by Mr. Dudley.

Such an announcement, to be supplied to a few newspapers by a friendly scribe, was all that Mr. Dudley hoped to gain from the accident which made him the temporary curator of the unfortunate Barton. But how little do we know when great things are in store for us.

He found, clutched in the hand that had lain under the body when first seen, a locket, of no great value.

This he easily and secretly secured as the policeman turned to repel the crowd that swarmed into the shop.

And he found life.

Life, and but little of it, as may well be believed. But enough to enable the poor, shattered, dying man to utter a few words, which Mr. Dudley, all ear and greed, extracted to the last syllable, the last sob.

An hour later the dead man was carried away.

For reasons inexplicable, but according to the custom of the intelligent many, small crowds continued to assemble and gaze severely at the front of Mr. Dudley's shop for many hours after the removal of the remains. Ordinarily, Mr. Dudley, scoffing at their folly, and raging at their impeding casual customers, would rush out and try to disperse such assemblage by dint of language not to be condemned for weakness. But upon the present occasion his not unpleasant face was undisturbed by contempt or indignation. He stood behind his counter, and smiled in a manner which greatly troubled the mind of his boy, a youth whose lines had not fallen in pleasant places, and who was a good deal beaten (generally deserving it) by his arbitrary master. This evening, however, though Mr. Dudley seemed not to care greatly to attend to customers, he was actually affable in his occasional directions to the youth, and responded to any business inquiries from him in a manner

which was bewildering from its good-nature. The younger medical gentleman, instead of receiving abuse from the elder, varied, when the shop was empty, by a vicious dig, or a box on the ears, was upon this occasion treated so kindly that he was at first astounded, and then irritated, and conceiving that his employer had some deep-laid plan for humiliating or oppressing him, was obliged to relieve his mind by frequently diving under the counter, and there making the most fearful grimaces by way of payment in advance for the wrongs he anticipated. But Mr. Dudley heeded him not, and when the hour came for closing the shop, and finally shutting out the big bottles of colored water from the view of the dissatisfied crowd, the incensed and puzzled assistant performed the duty with a wild and willful clatter, one quarter of which, on another evening, would have sent him hungering and sore to his bed. But Mr. Dudley marked it not, and filled up the cup of the youth's endurance by giving him a small sum of money to buy some beer, liberality ill-rewarded by the savage toast in which the furious boy invoked discomfort on his master. And Mr. Dudley sat up late that night, thinking.

He had better have acted promptly. He threw away advantages while he was meditating his course. Had he, the instant that he was in possession of the knowledge which he extorted from his dying patient, hastened back to the square, Dudley would have marvelously mended his chances. In the morning it was too late.

In the morning, however, and just before the hour when legal business usually begins, Mr. Dudley again entered the square. Various of the hard-faced women who act as servants to the profession were scuttling hither and thither, but with somewhat less of their ordinary slipshod haste. The catastrophe of the previous day was in their minds, and they felt it necessary to hold small indignation meetings from time to time, discuss the event, and gaze at the house before which it had happened. These inferior ministers of the law are not thought to entertain very friendly sentiments toward each other, nor did their conferences tend greatly to promote such feelings. But it was a duty to talk. With the curious faculty appertaining to the order, the conclaves managed to affix blame, in connection with the event, in quarters to which blame would scarcely seem to attach. Pity for the man was reproachfully expressed, and considerable disapprobation was expressed touching the Benchers, on the not improbable hypothesis that they were just then eating their comfortable breakfasts, and not thinking of the poor fellow who had been killed in putting new tiles on their property. It was also urged, with surly assent, that many folks cared very little what happened to any body but themselves, and that if rich people had to mend their own tiles they would not be in quite such a hurry to see that tiles were broken. It was, with one exception, unanimously agreed that the occupants of the house from which Barton had fallen ought to do something handsome for his wife and children, and the single opposition speaker, who could not at all see it in that way, and did not know what the gentleman on the first floor (who happened to be her employer) had to do with the matter, was accused of having no children, and informed that if she had any she would not go on in that manner. To her not unfair rejoinder that it was in conformity with social rule to have a husband previously to having children, and that she was not so lucky as to possess the preliminary advantage, she was sarcastically reproved for not knowing when she was well off. In much additional discussion, in the same key, a good deal of time was spent, until various smart and mostly undersized boys began to arrive at a prodigious pace, and to rush up their respective stairs, whistling violently while they dared enjoy that recreation, and before their stern superiors should come and make it *leze majesté*.

Mr. Dudley's form, larger than any usually seen in the Inn at that hour, attracted some attention, and he was at once recognized by several of the women, with whom he was rather popular. For he was easy with his prices when dealing with any of them, looking to possible recommendations, which, given in the hurry attendant on sudden illness, had more than once procured him a good patient in the person of a terrified bachelor in chambers.

"Good-morning, Mr. Dudley. Out early, Sir."

"Yes, Mrs. Partridge, I am always out early. I have seen five or six patients already, and thought I would look in, on my way back to breakfast, just to look at the place that poor fellow fell from. This was the house, I think."

"This house, Sir."

"A fearful fall; but perhaps it was better so than to linger for months in the hospital. Whose chambers are those at the top?"

"I really don't know, Mr. Dudley. My business stops at the first floor, and where my business stops I stop."

"A very sensible rule, Mrs. Partridge. But I suppose the gentleman who occupies those rooms has his name up. Mr. Percy Vaughan—" he said, reading the inscriptions. "I should think he would be called before the coroner. Somebody hinted that poor Barton might have been in the room with the open window."

"Somebody would be sure to say that, Mr. Dudley. Always suspect poor folks, of course, that's the way. But I shouldn't think that a gentleman on a top floor was likely to have much worth stealing."

"Oh, I don't accuse poor Barton a bit," said Mr. Dudley; "and it is in his favor, as I shall be ready and glad to say at the inquest, that nothing was found upon him by the police. I insisted on their searching before he was removed, and I can testify to the fact. A poor person's character is as valuable to him as a rich man's, Mrs. Partridge; and more so."

"It's very noble of you to say it, Mr. Dudley,

and it's what few gentlemen think," said Mrs. Partridge, whose sentimental zeal for the character of her order did her the more credit, inasmuch as, if her friends were not misinformed, it was notoriously disinterested.

"I am sorry for it, Mrs. Partridge. You don't happen to know this Mr. Vaughan's laundress, I suppose?"

It is the business of ladies of Mrs. Partridge's profession never to know any thing, but Mr. Dudley's sympathetic talk had worked her into a slightly abnormal state, and she replied readily enough:

"I have seen a patient of yours going up stairs sometimes, Mr. Dudley, and I suppose she does for Mr. Vaughan, but I never asked her. You know little Mrs. Wraggle, the same as had an eye about Christmas."

The description might have sounded mystically to some auditors, but it enabled Mr. Dudley to identify the person he wanted.

"Ah, poor thing! the fair little woman whose husband is a brute."

"She may give him cause, for what I know, Mr. Dudley," said Mrs. Partridge, with some bitterness.

"Very true, Mrs. Partridge. It is a bad world. She may be up there now. I will just go up and see."

He hastily mounted the stairs, abusing them for being so numerous; but though most of the other doors were open the single door on the top landing was closed. The doctor rattled it, but no answering word was given. Then he peeped into the letter slit, but the oaken door within was as closely shut as its companion. He sat upon, or rather against the dusty shelf by the window, and waited some ten minutes in the chance of Mrs. Wraggle's arrival, but that patient came not. Finally, in an evil temper, Mr. Dudley went home, and it was a bad morning for his junior.

We may remove poor Andrew Barton from the scene. The coroner's inquest was duly holden, and it elicited no fact with which we are unacquainted, while one or two small matters, known to the reader and to Mr. Dudley, were not revealed to the intelligent jury. It was shown that Barton was occasionally employed in repairs for the Inn, that he had certain work to do on the morning of his death, and that he had nearly completed his task. In answer to a teetotal juryman, who always introduced his favorite moral, in season or out of season, it was testified that Barton was perfectly sober when he went to his work. No evidence was adduced to show why he had gone to that part of the parapet whence he had fallen. Mr. Vaughan's laundress attended the inquest, and stated that her employer had been out of town on the day of the accident, and for several days previously, that he had since visited his chambers, had left some written orders for her, which she produced, but had said nothing of any theft or loss. He had again left town, and his return was uncertain. She did not know that he had ever heard of the disaster, but she was told that it was mentioned in the papers. We know what Mr. Dudley intended to say, and he said it. The jury returned the usual verdict, which they coupled with a recommendation to the Benchers of the Inn to place a strong iron railing all round their parapets, and the coroner, a gentleman of sense and humor, bit his lip rather severely while gravely taking note of the advice. So Andrew Barton died, and was buried.

CHAPTER II.

ONE SUNDAY EVENING.

We are still detained in the prosaic locality to which the reader has been introduced, and it has become more prosaic than ever, for the day is Sunday. Mr. Francis Haslop, the eminent conveyancing counsel, was at his chambers in Gray's Inn Square. He was there for what a Protestant would have regarded as a work of necessity and of mercy; but Mr. Haslop, a Catholic, would have deemed any such Sabbatarian excuse as supererogatory.

Looked at from a secular point of view, the chamber in which Mr. Haslop sat was a place which no gentleman of quiet habits could be blamed for selecting as a retreat at any time. His apartment on the first floor was furnished with comfort and with taste, and bore less resemblance to the ordinary work-shop of a busy lawyer than to the study of a literary man who has time and inclination for cultivating the mind that is to cultivate the minds of others. The handsome and lofty room was surrounded on three sides with book-cases, filled with a slowly chosen and valuable collection of works; and the loving care of the owner was testified in the befitting bindings and in the orderly arrangement of the library. There were two doors to the room, but both were concealed, when closed, by imitations of the adjoining shelves, and the quaint ingenuity of a scholar was displayed in the imaginary titles to the non-existent books. Thickly carpeted, with here and there a deep-haired and luxurious rug, with oak and crimson furniture of the best type, with a few valuable paintings, with three old Italian cut mirrors, and with a few choice objects either of antiquarian interest or fictile beauty, Mr. Haslop's chamber would have been pleasant at any time. It was especially pleasant on this beautiful evening of early August, when the open windows, whose cills were loaded with flowers, admitted the soft air, and allowed the owner's eyes to rest on the rich green of the garden turf. Always tranquil, this part of London assumes on the Sunday a stillness that may be felt, and the sudden and welcome cessation of certain jangling bells (yet among the unabated nuisances of our large towns), caused Mr. Haslop to give a nod of satisfaction, and to pour himself out a glass of claret from a crystal jug on a small table beside his easy-chair. The chair had been in old times

the property of a monastery, the table Mr. Haslop believed to have belonged to the Brinvilliers family, and the jug had what even the wary conveyancer deemed a good pedigree, and had been traced to the possession of Sir Kenelm Digby. And with most of the other furniture in the room some scrap of history was associated; for Mr. Haslop, being rich, could afford to wait for aught that he coveted, and could also afford to take it, without much heed to terms, when the opportunity came round. So when the jangle of the bells had ceased Francis Haslop poured out his wine, and with a satisfied glance at its rich color held it for a moment to his lips without tasting it, and then, with eyes resting on the flowers and the green turf, slowly drank the perfumed draught. Do not judge him unkindly that he took this glass of wine complacently, luxuriously, if you will.

Francis Haslop is of somewhat spare figure, tall and graceful in manner and movement, as a man of refinement who has seldom had need of hurry, and who has avoided as far as possible intercourse with others than persons of refinement. His head, though not of the highest or even the most powerful conformation, denotes ample and ready intelligence, and there is decision in the lower portion of the face. The hazel eyes are pleasantly keen, and have been proof against the interminable puzzles which it is his trade to solve and to set anew, for the golden eye-glass dangling at his button is never used when he is alone, but is merely kept as a defense to be occasionally thrown up against an antagonist. His complexion is fair, and his face entirely whiskerless. He may have been told, or have known without being told, that delicate and aristocratic features are too rare to be hidden as plebeians hide their coarse outlines. Has such a consideration weight with a gentleman of the age of fifty? But he has, in revenge, defied the fashion that crops the head to stubble, and his dark brown, rich, wavy hair, into which no line of gray has yet intruded, gives almost a picturesque character to the handsome head. His smile is not too ready, but when it comes is very pleasant, and to all appearance is devoid of that ironical expression so admired in the circles where conversation is not, however, usually overladen with second meaning, or greatly weighted with any. Mr. Haslop's smile is frank, as is natural in those who associate with the best and the best-natured society.

There is a knock at the outside door upon the landing.

"Come, there is one virtue where I did not expect even one—punctuality," observes Mr. Haslop.

He will not push away his Brinvilliers table, and he has no intention of offering his wine to the expected visitor, yet he would not sit in a churlish attitude even in the presence of one whom he dislikes. The old monastery chair stood stubbornly enough in its ancient chamber, but Mr. Haslop is no bigot, and, thanks to secular upholstery, it wheels round with a wish. His back is to the wine table, and he rises to admit his visitor, for Mr. Haslop's clerk is a Protestant, and devoutly observant of Sundays at Richmond. Besides, the tolerant employer does not want him now.

When the imaginary book-case closes again Mr. Haslop coldly but courteously requests his visitor to be seated.

The person who obeys is a man of gentlemanly dress and appearance, who looks perhaps more than thirty years of age, and is perhaps two or three years younger. He is not in the least awed by the lofty manner of the aristocratic lawyer, but is respectful, as is befitting, considering the difference of years. His look around him is an interested but not vulgarly curious gaze at the graceful features of the apartment; it is certain that he notes them more closely than is consistent with the absolute indifference held to imply that you also have been born in the purple, and that Tyrian dye has no charm of novelty for you. The stranger's eyes would perhaps first attract a stranger's notice—they are very fine, of a violet hue, and almost unpleasantly restless, or seem so in the calm of that apartment, and in presence of its tranquil master. You would next observe that the face is dark, is handsome, though with an occasional expression of fierceness, not so much called for by the business of the moment as by some internal and recurring habit of self-assertion; and then it might occur to you that the intellectual faculties of the man would seem to promise domination over all others save for the decided sensuousness of the mouth. The figure is slightly above middle height, is manly, even vigorous; and as the visitor, who is neatly and professionally dressed, draws off his well-fitted gloves, you perceive that the hands are large and powerful. Taken as a whole, the impression given you is favorable, but it may not be a good sign that as soon as this is proved you are inclined to analyze and to disturb your liking.

"I should apologize to you, Mr. Vaughan, for requesting you to call on a Sunday evening, but my reasons for doing so will be my excuse."

Nothing could be more courteous than the words, but Mr. Haslop's tone scarcely accorded with them. It was not lost upon Mr. Vaughan, who replied, as from a perfect level with his host, "Pray make no apology, Mr. Haslop."

The great lawyer looked at his visitor for a moment or two, perhaps with no unkindness in his thoughts. At all events, he said, after a short pause, and with less coldness:

"To *us*, you need not be told, the day is not one of observance like that of many excellent persons in this neighborhood—though, by-the-way, I suppose that the evangelical world, like the rest of us, emigrates after business hours?"

"I suppose that most rational persons endeavor to sleep in fresh air," said Mr. Vaughan, somewhat curtly. "I do, for one."

"I trust that you succeed," said Mr. Haslop. There may have been an under-meaning in the

words, but they were said so conventionally as to leave no excuse for reply.

"You have no partner, I think, Mr. Vaughan?" said the conveyancer, after a pause.

"I have no partner. A firm with whom you are in constant intercourse will tell you—I need, therefore, make no secret of it—that my business is not too large for my own management."

"Solicitors like to hunt in couples," said Mr. Haslop.

"Have you a partner to propose to me, Mr. Haslop?" replied Mr. Vaughan, almost haughtily, as indeed the previous speech warranted.

"I will tell you presently. Meantime will you favor me with an answer to a straightforward question, which you will believe that I put for a reason? What gentleman prepares deeds for you?"

"I prepare my own deeds," replied Mr. Vaughan, quietly.

"I am answered, of course, whether I am to understand you literally or not."

He waited as if to learn something, at least, by the reply; but the reply was the slightest bow.

"I will explain in a few words," said Mr. Haslop, after another pause, and an earnest look at his companion. "I will explain why I have asked you to call on me, and why I have asked you the question which you have—met. You desire to borrow from a client of a firm whose papers come to me—"

"Hippisley, Cleavedon, and Lawes, Lincoln's Inn Fields," said Mr. Vaughan, as in continuation of the other's words.

"The sum of two thousand pounds," said Mr. Haslop, without noticing the interpolation.

"I made no secret to Mr. Cleavedon that the money was for myself, and there is no reason why he should not have mentioned the fact to you, Mr. Haslop. It is satisfactory to me to infer, from matters having gone so far, that you approve of the security."

"Well, I have not yet advised on the title, but I may say to you that a perfectly good one is represented by the papers before me."

"I had no reason to believe otherwise, or I should hardly have placed them in the hands of gentlemen who consult Mr. Haslop."

"You *knew* that they employed me?" said Mr. Haslop, suddenly.

"Certainly, and—"

He stopped, and then repeated "Certainly."

"You were about to say something else," said Mr. Haslop, almost eagerly. "Will you say it?"

"Yes; but without intending any further explanation. It was because I knew that you were consulted by Mr. Cleavedon's house that I decided on applying to them for the money. I have no more to say on this point," said Mr. Vaughan, composedly.

"At present," murmured Mr. Haslop, again looking wistfully at his visitor.

"The title was examined in the usual and regular manner, and all documents were found to have been accurately described by you?" said Mr. Haslop.

"They were," said Mr. Vaughan, with a slight intonation of surprise. "I presume that Mr. Cleavedon would hardly have troubled you with the papers until that formality had been gone through."

"You said that you had no partner, Mr. Vaughan," said Mr. Haslop, gravely. "May I ask whether you are a married man?"

"I am not."

"Your business, you have told me, is not large. Is it so large—and I am asking so strange a question that I think it will dispose you to give me a frank answer—is it so large as to prevent your abandoning it for other occupation, presuming you saw your way?"

"I will answer with perfect frankness—it is not. But I shall work it up, and I want this two thousand pounds as capital. I think I have spoken plainly, Mr. Haslop, but I am in the hands of a gentleman."

"It is well for you, Percy Vaughan," said Mr. Haslop, coldly, "that you are in the hands of one whose notions of duty are not restricted to what is implied in the name of gentleman. How soon can you be ready to leave England?"

"I could leave England to-morrow. I have no intention of leaving it at all," replied Mr Vaughan, without the least manifestation of any kind.

"Let us have no idle words, Percy Vaughan. You perfectly understand me—you have understood me all along. I return those papers to Hippisley's firm on Wednesday. Shall you have left England by Tuesday night?"

"You have much more to say," replied the young solicitor.

"Nothing now. Something if you are here to-morrow night at ten o'clock."

Percy Vaughan's nature broke out in his answer.

"I can hardly be so early, as I have a lecture to deliver at Islington."

"Might I ask its character?"

"It is upon the history of some Popes of Rome, and would scarcely command your approbation, Mr. Haslop."

Our corrupt nature must take the blame of the thing, but it is certain that a man, however good, has an utterly unjustifiable admiration for manhood, however displayed. Knowing what Mr. Haslop knew, he had no right to relax the severity of his tone on this second repulse, and yet he only said:

"Give the lecture, and come to me when it is over. I will detain the papers one day more. One day only."

"I am not pressed for the money, Mr. Haslop, if that be your meaning."

Mr. Haslop has a self-asserting nature, too, and the fair complexion flushes and the hazel eyes shine out upon occasion, and the occasion is here. He conquers himself, however, as becomes a truly brave man, as he rises from his chair, and instead of making an angry and in-

dignant speech, he rests a hand upon the back of the chair, and says:

"Percy Vaughan, two years ago you were living on the borders of South Wales. During your sojourn there you rendered an important service to a young lady—Magdalen Conway."

The name has been so suddenly brought out that Percy Vaughan has had no time for self-mastery, and his face breaks into a glow.

He makes no answer.

"You saved that young lady from an outrage, and her friends are mindful that you did so. They will save you, in return, from a peril that now hangs over you, and I am ready to be their agent. Will you come to me to-morrow night at eleven, and say that you are ready to leave England?"

"If I say that I will not?"

"Do not act the madman, Percy Vaughan," said Mr. Haslop, with actual agitation. "You must go, and we throw open a gate for you—wait a few hours more and it must close against you. We would repay you the service you rendered to Magdalen Conway. We put no price upon such a service, but you wanted two thousand pounds—you shall have double the sum at ten to-morrow night. Am I to say any more?"

"Yes."

"You desire more money?"

"I do not wish to speak of that—let me ask you a question. Why am I to go?"

"Good Heaven! need I tell you to your face?"

"I wish you to do so."

"Because you are a forger."

"Yes," said Percy Vaughan, as calmly as if he had heard indifferent words; "I supposed that to be your meaning. May I ask what has led up to the suspicion which you have done me the honor to state as a fact?"

"I will tell you, but what does it matter? In forging the last deed but one of the series set out in the title you have laid before me you were hasty or ignorant enough to use words that had not yet been adopted—you forgot the date of an Act of Parliament."

This was evidently the truth, or why did Percy Vaughan turn pale? Not with fear, but with anger—anger with himself that he should have made this false step. But though anger will turn like the scorpion, it will not do so when there is aught else to sting.

"Who detected this?"

"I," was the calm answer.

"And you have kept the discovery to yourself?"

"We are quite alone, and there is no chance of any one entering these rooms for more than twelve hours. You are younger, and should be stronger than I am, and I take my seat in this chair," said Mr. Haslop, with calmness. "There is money in that cabinet, not so much, certainly, as I have offered you, but still a considerable sum. I have kept the secret to myself—no one else can know it but you. Are you thinking of violence? I have stated the temptations fairly, and you may think that it is better to take yonder money now than wait for the chance of my changing my mind."

The younger man made no reply for some moments, and then appeared to revert to Mr. Haslop's last words.

"Is it courageous," asked Percy Vaughan, "to use such language to me, after giving the right to say what you had said before?"

"I think it is," said Mr. Haslop, quietly. "But I have no wish to say any thing to you that is not strictly necessary. We all talk too much in this world. I was wrong," he added, "and I ask your pardon. I should have remembered that you showed yourself a brave man, when, single-handed, and with no weapon but a stake snatched from a hedge, you beat off the three miners, and rescued Miss Conway."

"It is not a great matter," said Percy Vaughan, "for an active man who understands single-stick to drive off a batch of half-drunken clowns. I did a braver thing than that, Mr. Haslop."

"I suppose that I guess your meaning."

"No one has ever had, from me, a right to guess it," replied Vaughan, earnestly; "but I tell you now, because we shall never meet again, that it was a braver thing in me to leave that neighborhood, and see Miss Conway no more."

"If you felt it to be so, it was so," said Mr. Haslop, coldly.

"You mean that my suit would have been hopeless, that I might have staid for any chance I had of any thing but gratitude from your ward. I understand the pride which speaks to me. Perhaps you are right."

"The discussion can not be useful. You will be here to-morrow night at eleven? After that, as you say, we shall probably not meet again."

"I will come."

He came on the following night, and very few words passed between them. Mr. Haslop placed the promised money in the hands of Percy Vaughan, refusing to take any sort of acknowledgment, and ending the interview as speedily as he could. Nothing could be less business-like than the entire transaction, as performed by one of the most regular and business-like of men. But Mr. Haslop, when alone, felt satisfied with what he had done. To hint at unsolved mysteries is a vulgar device, to make premature disclosures is an error in art, but it may be said that he knew more than we have told, but far less than we shall have to tell.

CHAPTER III.

THE OCTAGON CLUB.

"Oh! come here a minute, Wigs—glad I caught you," said Mr. Charles Launceston to Mr. Henry Wigram, as they met, about lunch time, in the hall of the Octagon Club.

"If you're glad, I'm glad," said Mr. Wigram,

in a voice which, for some reason, he usually made very melancholy, perhaps because no handsome young fellow in London had less to be unhappy about.

"Come into the smoking-room for two minutes," said Launceston, leading the way.

"You said one minute," murmured Wigram, pensively following his friend. "But never mind," he added, seating himself in the easiest of all the easy-chairs in the luxurious chamber which they had entered, and taking the usual comfortable attitude which long study in such matters had taught him to discover.

"Look here, Wigs. We are going to give Ernest Dormer a dinner. You'll be in it, won't you?"

"Who's we? and why to Dormer? and why ask me?" responded Mr. Wigram, hopelessly.

"Why, you like him, don't you?"

"I don't dislike him that I know of."

"Well, then, you'll be glad to hear that his marriage affair is settled at last, and is to come off next week."

"Why should I be glad to hear that a good fellow is going to be got rid of? Always the way. As soon as one has had time to find out that a man is worth knowing he bolts. I thought that marriage wasn't to be?"

"It wasn't. But it has been squared. The bride's parents can not make up their minds to part with their only child—I know mine were uncommonly ready to part with me, but that's nothing to the purpose—and so they have made the condition that Ernest shall settle down at Naybury. He agrees, and the event is fixed. And as I tell you, we're going to give him a sort of farewell dinner, by way of a finish to his bachelor existence."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"Might have done better for him than that," said Mr. Wigram, discontentedly. "Why didn't you go somewhere else?"

"What for? Phelps can do very well, if you give him time and instill a few notions into him. Latrobe is going to see to all that."

"Latrobe knows nothing about a dinner."

"He thinks he does, and Jemmy Rydon is to be viceroy over him."

"Who is simply a cannibal—an infatuated cannibal. I told him so last night, when he was actually eating those infernal canvas-back ducks, done to a cinder, instead of being just shown the fire. I suppose you want to prepare poor Dormer, by degrees, for the horrors of domestic cookery. Who are the other fellows?"

"Six or eight. Let's see—there's you, and there's myself, and Sam Mangles—"

"What for?"

"Dormer and he are very intimate, went to Norway together, and all that. And Mangles is a very good fellow, except to the authors he cuts up. Then there's Milwarden—"

"To run off to a consultation in chambers, or say he does, just as things are beginning to be a little pleasant."

"Well, I can't help his having no end of business, can I, you old grumble? He'll be a judge one of these days, and then he need not run away. Then there's Doddy Dalston, and Alford, and your friend Marsden."

"My friend? I never speak to him."

"But he speaks to you at awful length, which is all the same. Don't say it isn't, for I heard him a night or two ago explaining the French and Austrian treaties to you in his usual luminous and exhaustive manner, and I couldn't think what you wanted to be crammed for. Horace Clyde pretended to want to bet that you were going to stand for Finsbury."

"Horace Clyde is an ass. Is he coming to the dinner?"

"Come where there's any thing to pay? No, Wiggins. I asked him, for fun, and he spoke of Dormer's merits for twenty minutes, and stated that he admired Ernest to idolatry, and would have given any thing to be off an engagement for that evening with some old college friends. If you like to invite him as your guest, I'll lay six to two he finds that he mistook the day of the college dinner."

"I wish he was coming, though," said Wigram, whom no arrangement exactly pleased. "He tells good stories, and never sulks if he is interrupted."

"I've told you how to get him. I don't think there's any body else. Yes, there's a young fellow, a parson, I fancy, or thereabouts, called Grafton. Sam Mangles knows him."

"One of his contributors, I suppose. But I don't see why he should dine here because he sells ill-nature to Sam Mangles."

"That's not it. He lives in Naybury, where Dormer is going to live, and I think that Grafton, *père*, is a rector in the neighborhood."

"Nice account the young confessor will be able to give to the ladies at Naybury about the bridegroom's friends and associates. A clever thing, your asking him, certainly."

"That's not my business, Wiggy. Besides, this club is celebrated for its virtue and morality. Now I'm going to ring for some sherry and bitters. Have some?"

"The bitters here are simply detestable, but I will have a glass of dry sherry, as they are pleased to call it. Is this match a good thing for Ernest Dormer?"

"There will be a good deal of money coming when the old folks go, I believe, but I don't imagine that they hand over much now."

"The selfishness of age—what a sad thing selfishness is! I have sometimes thought that you were inclined to be selfish, Charles. Pray eschew the habit. What is the young lady's name—I forget—begins with a C—Conroy, or thereabouts?"

"Conway. Christian name Magdalen, which I happen to know from having assisted at the purchase of divers jewels for her young ladyship."

"Conway, yes. Did I not hear something about a conversion from Popery, or to Popery, or something?"

"I think there was something of the sort, and one don't like to hear of such things. People who get converted are usually open to other influences. I really don't know which way it was. Dormer will be comfortable enough, I suppose—he has about fourteen hundred a year, and his uncle cleared his debts, you know. And then he is not a helpless beggar without mental resources, like you. He can read a book, and understand it, and he can write reasonably well, so that he has occupation. It's a good hunting country. And I hear, too, that the girl is very nice indeed."

"Well, we'll hope for the best. Ring again, and ring like the devil. I believe that there is no house in the whole world where the servants are so long in answering the bells."

Mr. Phelps, the cook at the Octagon, was on his mettle. His predecessor, a splendid Frenchman, had been adored by the female domestics, but obnoxious to the quieter members of the club, by reason of his utter and avowed contempt for any gentleman who ordered a mutton-chop. Many men like mutton-chops, and those who do are usually long-suffering, but very determined when they take action. The Octagon men rebelled, and insulted the Committee. The Committee were individually haughty, but as a body submissive, and the French artist was discharged, nominally on the ground that the club-maidens found him too fascinating for the moralities. He took this as a compliment, and retired gracefully. The Englishman's testimonials were admirable, and men do not give a testimonial to a cook with the lavish and unconscientious profusion of laudation which one puts into a letter intended to help a clerical or medical friend into a responsible office. It was not denied that Mr. Phelps lacked some of the higher attributes of a cook, but if unimaginative, he was earnest, and a true, if not an inspired artist. He took office, but was made to understand that the Committee would be severe and perhaps unfriendly watchers of his policy. Happily for himself, he had both nerve and ambition, and he was sustained by the confidence of the middle classes in the club, to whose opinions he made no secret of his belief that much deference ought to be shown. He gave special attention to the mutton-chops.

Launceston, who was on the Committee, and who belonged to the high epicurean party, had all a gentleman's sense of justice; and though, as we have heard, he was not inclined to be enthusiastic, he had even taken the trouble to hold a conference with Mr. Phelps touching the banquet in question, and had imparted to the cook some valuable hints, besides an intimation that this dinner would probably settle his *status* in the judgment of his patrons. The soul of the artist was touched; he thanked Launceston, but not with unworthy humility, and resolved, in the language of a sterner art than his own, to do all that he knew. He showed that he knew a great deal.

The party assembled, and it happened that though collected with reference to Ernest Dormer's position rather than to the liking of the various men for one another, the gathering was a good and a representative gathering. Most of the fellows had a specialty, and few bored the others with it. Mr. Mangles, the editor of a critical journal, and one of its best writers, was appointed to be the chief of the feast, because on that occasion it would be necessary to make a little speech in honor of the guest, and Mr. Mangles was great at little speeches. He was an exceedingly good-hearted man, always doing kindnesses in a private way, and executing his public victims as matter of business and without either malice or mercy. If you were a poet, or a novelist, or a historian, he would utterly ruin —or instruct one of his brilliant myrmidons to ruin—your play, tale, or romance, if he deemed it meet, the week after he had dined with you and floated French anecdotes to you through smoke until three in the morning. But if you were in a scrape of any kind, or if there were illness in your house, he would drive over London until that or any other hour in the morning to hunt up friends, or doctors, or any body whom you thought could be useful, and his check-book was as ready as his kind words. Outsiders, who knew nothing of his good-nature, believed him to be an incarnation of cruelty, sent on earth for the destruction of rising talent, and his friends, who understood him, could not be expected to be always expounding his merits—friends do not exert themselves much to such ends—so Mr. Mangles bore an unfavorable reputation far and wide. This he bore very easily; he made a great deal of money, and, being a bachelor, he lived pleasantly and wrote unpleasantly in the most comfortable of chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields. His tall thin figure, keen features, and unsympathetic manner might have made it probable, as times go, that he was the husband of some very pretty and affectionate little woman who worshiped him, and doubtless he might have been, had he so chosen, but he did not choose to be worshiped, and certainly worshiped nobody.

There is not much more to say of Mr. Charles Launceston than we have already said in recording that gentleman's conversation with his friend. He had been in the army, and had seen some service, but had retired with the intention of marrying a young lady who had accepted him, and having then seen somebody whom she thought she liked better, had evaded the disagreeable duty of telling Launceston this except by eloping with the gentleman whom she preferred. Charley Launceston was chiefly enraged because Mary Woolnott's irregular behavior had caused him to disarrange his life to no purpose. His friends consoled him with the epigrams always made upon a girl who elopes, and with the prophecies which as regularly attend such an event, and Charley was readily comforted, and gave himself to billiards. Every body liked him. It has been said that nearly all the guests on this occasion had specialty.

Charley Launceston was an exception, unless we may reckon as an accomplishment his unrivaled power of giving nicknames at the shortest notice. Some of them stuck.

Mr. Milwarden was a handsome, very bright-eyed, and very pleasant-tongued barrister, who was rising rapidly. Foreseeing that he would, as Launceston had said, become a judge, and having observed that some of our excellent judges have fallen into error for want of practical knowledge of life, Mr. Milwarden, with a prudence hardly to have been expected in one so young, was taking pains to familiarize himself with all kinds of life, daily, and likewise nightly. The unthinking might suppose that he was only amusing himself and gratifying an energetic and buoyant nature when they met him at all sorts of places and at all sorts of hours, but he was always ready with the gravest explanation that a lawyer can never tell what sort of knowledge may not be useful to him. Like Bacon, he said he held all knowledge to be his province. Milwarden's readiness and presence of mind were rare gifts. To see him, after a clamorous supper-party at chambers, throw down his cards and cigar, and suddenly address himself to stupid and earnest law talk on a remote sofa, was to be convinced that his future would be just what he pleased to make it. He made his present as crowded and exciting a day as is good for a gentleman of thirty.

The other London guests may just be "observed," as the reporters say. Doddy Dalston —let us save the honor of his sponsors by mentioning that he was christened Theodore—was not thought to have much imagination; but if he had a dim idea of a future state, it was held that Doddy's visions were of some place where nobody has to pay debts. His earthly power of incurring obligations of the kind, notoriously never meeting them, and yet of always looking like a gentleman, and having money for every body but creditors, amounted to a financial and social miracle. His utter ruin had long ceased to be matter of prediction, and had taken its place in history; but there Doddy sat, exceedingly well-dressed, and listening with an air of complacency to solvent men, and as if his only doubt was whether he should buy the house which one of them wished to sell, or to beg the other to invest the money for him in Madagascar Passives. Moreover, whether Doddy Dalston got hold of his money by burglaries, as some of his friends insisted, or by picking the pockets of bankers' clerks in the City, as others contended, he got it, and never sponged. It need not be said, therefore, that Dalston was much liked. So was Jemmy Rydon, for other causes, the most salient perhaps being the capital parties which he was fond of giving at a certain secluded villa in a northwestern suburb, where Mr. Rydon, who always intended to marry, but never did, was rehearsing domesticity. So was little Walter Latrobe, because he had been a gallant soldier, and in an emergency had held a fort with a handful of men against a raging mob of Indian niggers, and with his own small white hand had sent a dozen of them to Padalon before the relieving force of cavalry came down to the slaughter. He had a gentle feminine voice, and was loved of women for his beauty and valor, and of children because his business in life was the invention of child-games. It may be that he was wicked at odd hours. Then there was the instructive Dick Marsden, who knew every thing, and the indolent Tom Alford, who knew nothing, and the remaining type was Willy Daimes, who went in for politics, and was always standing for some place or other, and always losing because he made his agents leave off bribing just at the point when another three hundred pounds would have sent their principal into the British Legislature.

The Reverend Edward Grafton, who had been invited by Mr. Mangles, for the reasons which we have heard imparted in the Launceston fashion, will be heard of hereafter, and it is not desirable to keep the dinner waiting while we enter into his history or his character. He appeared to the rest of the party in the guise of a tall, slight, fresh-colored young clergyman, who had a good deal to say, but not the art which enables a man to bring out what is in him. He colored a little in speaking, spoke too long when he got an innings, and waited too long to get one. Two or three of the party noticed that he took wine somewhat too fast, and that late in the dinner he was inclined to echo the words of others, and express himself captiously thereabout. These small signs might merely indicate that the young clergyman had not had time to become a man of the world.

Nor will we, as yet, say much more of the chief guest of the evening, Ernest Dormer, than could have been said next day by any of those who dined with him. Let him disclose his character for himself as he goes through life. It is only in novels that you are given so tremendous an advantage over a new acquaintance as is comprised in your reading his biography before you meet. Let us, being among gentlemen, play more fairly. Nobody at that table, except Mr. Mangles, knew much about Ernest Dormer, popular as he was at the club that was thus affectingly bidding him farewell. Every body was always glad to see the handsome, easy-mannered, frank-spoken man, of two or three and thirty, who could talk horses and salmon and ballet with the light-minded, but had an eye for the *Indépendance Belge* and the British division lists, and could not only quote Horace, but had, on occasion, proved that he knew Greek. He was ready with good stories and sayings, discreet or less discreet, by other people, and he was able, without manifest effort, to say a reasonably smart thing of his own. He always spoke kindly of women; in fact, so charitably that pious women did not believe he had any religion. He was not, however, reluctant to say unkind things of men; but it was in a way which seemed to imply that this was only the conventional mode of showing one's clear-

sightedness — the world did not believe that Ernest Dormer was malicious. He dressed well, if somewhat under the mark at which man becomes angel in the eyes of the teens; but he could afford this, for his fine, well-set head, with rich auburn hair, bright Saxon eyes, clean-cut lip—some little temper hinted there—and gallant bearing, made him a notable in most companies of the somebodies. Tall, well-made, not obtrusively active in movement, but with a frame which gave evidence of power, Ernest Dormer was a capital specimen of the English gentleman, who is neither an epicurean nor an athlete. When in London he rode, but shot no pigeons and pulled in no boats. When in the country, with friends, he took the field sports easily, never coming to grief, but rivaling no groom or game-keeper, and, so far as his friends knew, his gambling was limited to a few mild bets in the great races, and a readiness to back his habitual good luck at whist. Of his private life his intimate friends knew only what has been hinted, namely, that he had certainly got into debt, and had lately been helped out of it. Charley Launceston, who liked him very much, nevertheless declared, photographically, that he was a very successful Negative, but Charley did not know every thing.

We are grateful to some old novelists, especially that disagreeable Scotchman, Mr. Tobias Smollett, for recording the conversations of our ancestors. Not that the conversations themselves are worth much, but that they show those venerated persons in their natural manner, and not instructive, patriotic, or sentimental. It may be supposed—though we try to repel the idea—that a hundred years hence our club talk will seem as pert and in as bad taste as the tavern dialogues which Tobias has given us. I apprehend that there is no remedy for this. We write or speak vainly, if in the belief that our tone is better than that of our grandfathers, or in the hope that it will be more acceptable to our grandchildren. One does not know by what sarcastic word they will ridicule our old-fashionedness and dullness; one does not know whether, a hundred years hence, it will be the thing to be very refined or very coarse. But we may be assured that in either case we shall be contemptuously dealt with, even as we have dealt with all those who have gone before us. Let us defy posterity, *d'avance*, and speak as free Britons.

"Study your dinner, gentlemen," said Mr. Mangles. "Having had nothing to do with ordering it, I may be allowed to say that the document before each of you shows an effort of high art, for which labor we are much indebted to two persons, or shall I say parties? now present."

"What's the objection to the word party?" said Milwarden. "I admit that it is used in the diplomacy of plebeians, but it is a good word, indicating an interest. Person is a feeble abstraction."

"You speak as a mere lawyer, Milwarden," said Wigram, in his melancholy voice.

"Don't talk of mere lawyers as if they were black beetles, Mr. Wigram, but pass the cayenne."

"Cayenne to that! Latrobe and Rydon, overlook the insult to yourselves, and let us ask the waiters not to tell Phelps."

"Or rather," said Rydon, solemnly, "let him be told that it was only Milwarden who could so trample on an artist's feelings. I have always held that the law is a brutalizing profession."

"One has heard the sentiment," said Milwarden, composedly, "chiefly, however, from vexatious defendants and prisoners whose alibis have broken down."

"It's too early in the dinner for talk," said the gentle Walter Latrobe.

"Especially chaff," said the instructive Dick Marsden. "In fact, with any stranger present, I submit that this sort of thing, which the interlocutors appear to think repartee, be remitted to the smoking-room. Mr. Grafton, I assure you that there is not that absolute lack of sense here which you would infer from the tone of these gentlemen."

The young clergyman was not ready with a reply to the half-banter of the serious looking Marsden, but Mangles was always ready.

"Rather thank Mr. Grafton, as the representative of a virtuous country village, that Dormer is to be removed there before he gets mentally demoralized."

"You'll keep in the club, Dormer, I hope?" said Tom Alford.

One or two listened for the answer.

"My subscription is paid, you know, several months in advance," said Ernest Dormer, "so I have time for consideration."

He had not answered the question, and the clergyman, who had expected an instant reply in the negative, looked up at him involuntarily. Ernest knew why, and at once added, laughing:

"I don't think that they'll see much more of me here, Edward."

"I should think not," said the priest, simply.

"The engaged men always say that," said Mr. Rydon, jollily, yet with a certain faint malice. "I have heard the vow till I know it by heart, and it is kept like a good many other vows."

"Rydon, as a moralist of the first class, a Sir Galahad of the Wood of St. John, is entitled to be severe on us who only try to be good," said Ernest Dormer, as pleasantly, and quite as meaningly.

"I hear you," said Rydon, who was really good-natured. "Well, Willy Daimes, how are your politics? Quite well? I saw a brougham at your door yesterday, and fancied it was Mr. Brand's. Are they going to put you in any where?"

"I have not heard of it," said Mr. Daimes; "but it would be a delicate attention on the part of the Cabinet."

"You lost Mutford, I think?" said Marsden, in his curt, unfeeling way, not that he meant to hurt feelings, but having none of his own, he

never recognized any body else's. "You were nearly in, I believe, but came to grief in a hurry?"

"I resigned when I saw that I could not go on without the use of means which—which I did not intend to use," said Mr. Daimes.

But Marsden meant to say his say, and though he was not at all intimate with Daimes, and though he was annoying that unlucky candidate very much, he went on.

"Bosh, my dear fellow! we all know about that. A man who is in the Home Office told me exactly what was spent on both sides. The joke of it is, that it is a matter of certainty that if you had not been frightened and thrown up the sponge at two, the other man would have given in at a quarter past. He makes no secret of it."

"In that case you have a right to tell it," said Mr. Daimes, enraged. "And I have a right to say that I don't believe a word of it."

"But consider, my dear Daimes," said Milwarden, smiling, "how much more enviable is your position than that of your guilty opponent. He boasts a victory bought with gold, while you are proud of a defeat—"

"Bought with bank-notes," said Launceston.

"Hush," said Milwarden. "At the same time I regret the result, because had Daimes been returned, and petitioned against, as he would certainly have been, I think his regard for me would have been shown in a brief."

"You were certainly wrong to retire as you did," persisted Marsden the pachydermatous. "At least they all say so, and that they expected you would show more pluck."

"Expected that he would stand more plucking," said Launceston.

"I fear you are frivolous, Launceston," said Mr. Mangles. "Some wine? I say I fear you are frivolous. I wish you would read some books, and purify your mind from old jokes."

"I like that," returned Launceston, "when it is the business of your life and that of your accomplices to prove that no books are worth reading."

"The reply was prompt," said Mangles, serenely; "but I could probably make a few selections, of a rudimentary character, that might enable you to commence an education."

"I'll come to you for it to-morrow, Samuel, my son," laughed Launceston; "and as I shall come at lunch time, have out that famous Amontillado of yours. Have you tasted that fellow's Amontillado, Doddy?"

"No," said Theodore Dalston; "but I don't believe it's better than mine," he added, as doggedly as if he were a millionaire.

"We'll have two competitive lunches, then," said the radiant Launceston. "Doddy against Sammy, at the competitors' rooms and expense, and every body here shall come and judge between them. That is the English, manly way of settling a dispute, eh?" he said, looking defiantly round, as if the proposition had been assailed. "Tom Alford and Henry Milwarden, charge yourselves with the execution of this decree."

"Have you seen Gracie Clare in the *Demon and the Dumpling*, Alford?" asked Mr. Rydon.

"Never heard of the play. What is it?" was the reply.

"The play's a burlesque, if you know what that is."

"Yes, I know what that is."

"I don't believe he does," said Milwarden. "On your oath, did you ever see a burlesque, Thomas Alford? and be cautious, because your words will be taken down. Don't hurry, but mind and speak the truth."

"You all chaff me because I don't go to the theatres much," returned Mr. Alford, "but I never heard any of you come in from one of them without declaring that he never heard such bosh in the course of his life. Why should I bore myself?"

"Rydon," said Milwarden, "I see you are unequal to the reply—excuse me for taking it out of your hands. Alford, have you no duties to society? Is every thing to be determined by your selfishness? Could a community hold together if all men followed your rule? Do you ever dine out? Can you sit by a young lady at dinner for five minutes, and not be asked the question which Rydon asked you, or something cognate thereto? Do you know what cognate means? Do not confound it with cognac, which is coming round."

"The theatre bores me, I tell you," said the unmoved Tom Alford. "First, it gives me a headache. Secondly, there are no pieces worth hearing. Thirdly, there are no actors worth seeing. Fourthly, I hate to dine early. Fifthly, I hate to dress. And sixthly, they won't let you smoke, even between the acts."

"Orson is endowed with reason, after all," said Latrobe. "I never go, if I can help it, except to take children. That's fun, if you like."

"Yes, that's your weakness, I know," said Dalston. "I tried it, I am sure, in good faith. I took my sister's children, when she was out of town, to see *Frankenstein* and the *Castle Spectre*, and she would not speak to me for three months. I give you my word the creatures screeched till we were nearly turned out of the theatre. How I hated them just then, and they are pretty little things too."

"By Jove!" said Walter Latrobe (only he made a stronger appeal and meant it), "you ought to have been hanged."

"Very likely," said Doddy, "all in good time. I say, Latrobe, you know the Sylehams, I think?"

"I am happy to say yes. Lady Syleham's two youngest girls are the loveliest children in the whole world."

"Not prettier than my nieces, I'll bet. But the girl I am going to speak of is not exactly a child; that is, she may be nineteen or so. I saw her at the Zoological on Sunday."

"That must be Isabella, the second daughter. The eldest is married. Who was she with?"

"Fat party in velvet, garrulous, overdressed, and asthmatic."

"I don't know. Lady Syleham is a lady, and looks one."

"Never mind, I bear no malice against Miss Isabella for having been so accompanied. She would atone for an uglier guy of a chaperon. I say, by Jove, what an awfully lovely complexion!"

"Isn't it rather? And such sweet eyes!"

"There is a clergyman present, gentlemen," said Mr. Mangles.

"I wish he could be present at a brief but significant interview between the lady we speak of and myself," said Doddy Dalston. "I suppose you couldn't introduce me, Latrobe the brave."

"Not brave enough for that," said the soldier, in his gentlest voice.

"I fear you share the common want of faith in my financial attitude," said Dalston, archly. "It is strangely difficult to be appreciated in this world."

"The error will probably be corrected in the next," said Milwarden, judicially; "for which reason, prisoner, it is charitable to wish you many happy returns of the day."

Edward Grafton would probably have felt it his duty to make some remark on this levity, but he was engaged in talk with Mangles, who amused himself by sounding the young clergyman in reference to M. Renan, whose sentimental star had just appeared in the theological horizon.

"I have not read the book. I don't want to read it," said Mr. Grafton. "In fact," he said, simply, "I don't read French with any comfort. But I have seen it described, and I have had extracts before me, and I know enough of it to be clear that M. Renan is a detestable infidel."

"*Convictus atque combustus*," said Milwarden, gravely.

"Yes, I would burn the book," said the young clergyman, coloring, but not abashed. "I am aware that any thing like earnestness in such matters is out of fashion; but," he added, vehemently, "if I would crush a viper that was going to poison the body of my child, why should I not crush out a book that might poison his soul?"

It may be taken for fact that never in the history of the Octagon Club had member or stranger pronounced words of this kind within the walls. It spoke well for the good manners of the audience that nobody smiled, or even looked surprised. I doubt whether a prayer-meeting would have behaved as politely had a spectator suddenly appealed to the Koran.

"I am not defending M. Renan," said Mr. Mangles, as soon as he could bring his mind back into its habitual mood of gentlemanly cynicism. "I think the work as weak as water. Speaking only as to matter of taste, we do not wish to see the Veil decked with tinsel. But," he went on, not exactly knowing what to say, "ought we not to respect faith, even when only a grain of mustard seed?"

"Not French mustard," said Ernest Dormer.

And the speech, not over-reverent, relieved the party, for it gave them an excuse for a laugh, and theology passed away. But the memory of that young clergyman's speech came back in after-days to some who forgot it when their surprise had gone by.

The good wine of the Octagon did its work, and man after man unthawed, lost his mannerism, and talked hard and fast. Latrobe, whom nothing ever excited, except some case of cruelty to a child, was one of the two who maintained his composure, yet even he occasionally raised that small white hand which had been dyed so red in his Indian fray, and sought to make his gentle voice heard amidst the strife of tongues. The rest flew at all game, and discussed public and private characters, men, women, books, pictures, politics, and scandal, with that perfect freedom of language which is found only among London men of a certain type. There was some wit, some humor, but a certain reckless decision in pronouncing sentence was the special feature of that debate, and Edward Grafton, in spite of his college experiences, was astounded at the promptness with which that party of self-reliant and unhesitating judges gave the doom in all and every thing that came before them. The other quiet man was Ernest Dormer, who heard them all, but answered few. Perhaps he was thinking that he should hear little more of that fiery talk when he should have accepted the conditions imposed by the parents of his bride.

CHAPTER IV.

MAGDALEN'S HOME.

It may be doubted whether the novelist who works elaborately upon the description of scenery and other external objects is not rather complying with tradition, or with his own sense of his art, than earning the attention or the gratitude of his reader. Rare indeed is the faculty of effectively dealing with nature and with the additions which man has made to her handiwork, and even more rare is the habit of patient heed to each successive touch by which the picture is made to approach completion. There have been mighty masters in their department of art, who by a few bold strokes suddenly impress upon you the character of the scene into which they hurry you; and there are still among us those who by close and exquisite painting compel you to follow detail after detail, and who have the power to delay the reader from the stronger excitement of narrative. But unless we have to conduct him into regions of grandeur, or into those whose extreme beauty must not be unrecognized, it may be more than questionable whether the writer who would please should not leave the reader to please himself in

the realization of localities. It may be safely asserted that the majority of readers will do so, without overnice attention to the stage-directions of the author, and will, upon general hints from the latter, freely draw upon their own memories or constructive power. Hence it may be that our forefathers were not so unwise in the matter as this enlightened age knows them to be upon all others. Our ancestors of the writing sort told us that Mr. Bountiful resided in a beautiful but retired village in the western part of the kingdom, and that Lady Wishfort, disgusted with life, took refuge in a rocky district of the north, the ruggedness of which she found akin to her misfortunes, and our ancestors of the reading sort devised their own arrangement of beauties and ruggednesses, and were not ungrateful. The critics of other days kindly awarded high praise for a nice Observation of Nature, in cases where a reference to the praised observer's work will show how very slightly he intruded his objectivities. It will be subject of regret to the present writer should any less kindly critic of the present day intimate an opinion that this prelude is but an excuse for non-conscientious work. I trust that such a censor will be able to forgive himself when he shall have visited the place to which I am about to invite him.

Naybury is a small, quiet town in the very middle of England. The steep hill on which it is built is the hard idea which arises when the place is named. Otherwise it is remarkable for little except the crookedness of the road up that hill, at the top of which are the ruins of a castle. This hold, after housing a forgotten series of strong-handed and not always ill-conditioned aristocrats, went to wreck under the blow of King Oliver. Thenceforth Naybury castle gave shelter to no person worse or better than an occasional tramp who might scale the old wall, and sleep away his tipsy hours in what once was a great kitchen. The owl succeeded to the chaplain, and the sparrow-hawk to the lord. The castle, and a church, in which the patriotic wardens have for years done their best to avenge the Norman conquest by persistent injury to the beautiful Norman architecture, are the features of Naybury. The weary pedestrian and the wearier horse may take closer note of the long and crooked hill. It is called Naybury Street, and winds upward for about three quarters of a mile as you approach from the east, and at last brings you to the foot of the off-lying eminence crowned by the ruins. It is a heart-breaking road to ascend from the east, and there is a knee-breaking road to descend on the other side of the town. Visitors are usually conducted to the extreme top of the hill, because, as they are informed, they can thence see a long way, and this is a truth, but with the discovery that it is so the advantages of the ascent appear, to commonplace minds, to end. You see a long way, and on a very clear day, just about the point where vision begins to fail, you may notice to the west something which, if not a cloud, is the beginning of some hills. But, generally speaking, your view is over a flat country, here and there divided by a narrow stream, here and there relieved by a church spire; and if you gaze for a long time on this scenery, as few persons are known to do, there grows upon you a conviction that you have seen this long, dull flat before. But you can not tell where, and you tease your memory with questions until bedtime, when, if you have partaken of supper, and have not walked the after-mile which those stupid ancestors of ours prescribed, you will have the nightmare. Then, in struggling in vain across wide plains, with the avenger of blood behind you on an elephant, you will feel that you have miles and miles to run in your patent-leather boots, and that you will miss the express train that is to take you to be married directly, and you know you have the key of the wine-cellar, and all your guests are waiting to go down to dinner on your birthday, and the Speaker of the House of Commons is calling wildly to you, in the very worst of language, to put in your false teeth and answer Mr. Bright, and your boots have suddenly become old slippers, which fall off every moment, and your wife is making signs that you must instantly go up in the balloon with her, or abandon her to Peter the Great forever, and still you can not make any progress, you wake up gurgling a very wrong kind of word, and instantly know that in previous nightmares you have seen the view from Naybury Castle.

In the long, crooked street are some of the houses of other days, where the beams were exhibited to show the honesty of the builders, and between these houses are hideous cottages, run up by local and modern builders, in connection with whose work one thinks less of honesty than of bad drainage and extortionate rent. There are three or four inns, possibly looking worse than they are, and a low-browed shop belonging to the only tradesman in flesh, who, by reason of his monopoly is, like Richard the Third, tyrant and butcher. Some other reasonably decent shops may be found, but they are not ostentatious. Just at the lower end of the town, beside a clear stream that runs below the hill, is the red shaft of a small factory, which supplies London with some of its felt, and turns out on Naybury a mass of stunted, sallow, slatternly girls, whose loud and vicious talk defies all remonstrance and tract-distribution.

Again ascending the hill, and passing through the greater part of the town, you observe a large and handsome red-brick house, of the time of Queen Anne. It stands back a considerable distance from the road, and some fine trees nearly screen it from the view. But if you walk up to the close, green, wood-palings, and look over them and between the trees, you will see a large and carefully-kept garden, with much sward and many evergreens, and if it be summer time you will notice a wealth of bright flowers, and the vision will be all the more welcome as being the first pleasant thing which you have

seen in Naybury, except the faces of many dirty but very healthy children. But, if you please, you shall by-and-by be enabled to see that handsome house without the questionably civil process of examining it over the palings.

There is a charming breakfast-room at the back of the house, and looking, with a single large window, upon another garden, even more daintily kept than that in the front. The window is open, and from the top of his cage, which has been placed on a smoothly-shaven little lawn, very fresh and green, a lazy parrot occasionally peeps into the room, and encourages its inmates by a slight croak of satisfaction at the general aspect of affairs. A beautiful Persian cat, with the mildest of eyes and the largest of tails, watches the bird, and evidently wonders why he can not sit still and enjoy that sweet warm morning, instead of fidgeting from wire to wire without object or purpose. In some other cages, of pretty device and suspended from trees, are a few love-birds and waxbills, and a couple of ring-doves are in a larger cage on a stand. A garden-chair, placed in the shade, but very near the zoological group, has lately been tenanted, for there is a book upon the seat, and a sun-shade lies on the grass, but there is no one in the garden at the moment.

In the room are two persons. These are Mr. and Mrs. Conway, husband and wife, parents of Magdalen Conway, of whom we have heard. The house is theirs. There is little that is remarkable in the externals of either. Mrs. Conway is a gentle-looking lady, with calm eyes, and a few silver streaks in her hair. The pleasant face, though it has been in the world for some fifty-five years, is but slightly lined, and the lips, which are pretty, are very ready to smile. Mrs. Conway's voice is light, and it is manifest that she is blessed with that best of all good gifts, habitual cheerfulness. She is very simply dressed, but unless her lady's maid have skill, it is certain that the very becoming morning-dress worn by the matron was not made in Naybury, and the fastenings at breast and wrist are in too good taste not to have been costly. Mr. Conway is enveloped in a very large and full morning-gown, so that his costume gives no key to his vocation, and a white cravat is worn by men of various callings. He is nearly seven years older than his wife, and looks many years older, and the restless eye and unquiet gesture would show that he has not been in the habit of taking the world easily, even if an occasionally impatient tone did not break into the conjugal conference. If he were to rise you would see that he is tall, and but for the ample gown you would notice that he is slight, and has been active—perhaps is so yet. He holds a handsome paper-knife, of mother-of-pearl, and if Mrs. Conway has a trouble it is a fear that he will break this weapon if he slaps it so hard upon the table, and she would like to take it away from him, but knows better than to do that.

"Well, it is a risk."

"Every thing is a risk, dear, to a certain extent."

The respective speakers need hardly be indicated. Mr. Conway replied:

"Yes, of course, Mary. But there are risks that one may run and take one's chance, and others that ought to give us pause."

"Give you what, dear?" said Mrs. Conway, quietly. She was not very well-read, perhaps, in Shakspearian literature.

"Make us hesitate!" said Mr. Conway, looking round at her sharply, and then looking away again.

"Yes, certainly," said Mrs. Conway.

"What do you say?" asked her husband. "I mean what do you say after what we have heard? You have formed an opinion, I suppose, just as I have done."

"I do not know that I have," replied Mrs. Conway. "It does not seem to me that there is any thing to fidget about."

"Fidget is hardly the word, my dear Mary, when we are talking of the happiness of Magdalen. I know you did not mean it rudely to me."

"Yes, I think you might know that, William," said Mrs. Conway, "or I have been talking to you to very little purpose for thirty years. But you *are* inclined—well, I will not say to fidget, but to vex your mind with matters which are not important. At least I think so."

"I dare say I do. And, generally speaking, I wish I did not. But this is a subject which requires the utmost consideration."

"You always say that of every thing, William."

"I do not. But as the child's mother you ought to feel with me in this, and consider it with me in all its bearings."

"My dear William, I am sure that I love Magdalen as well as you can, but when we have so completely made up our minds that she is to marry Mr. Dormer, and the lawyers have made out the settlement, I do not think that we have a right to begin to hesitate unless we have something before us much more serious than the talk of a foolish young curate."

"Grafton is not a fool."

"I did not say that he was, and when I said foolish I only meant in regard to London gentlemen and their ways. He is a clever person in some things, and would be much cleverer if he would have more confidence in himself and not suppose that every body is laughing at him, and that be deserves it. But I should not take his opinion upon the characters of persons whom he knows very little about, and has met only at dinner."

"The fact is, Mary, that you like the marriage, and don't want to hear any thing against it."

"If I did not like Ernest Dormer, would I give my consent to his having Magdalen?"

"But I think that you are rather too ready in giving your liking, Mary."

"I was once," said Mrs. Conway, "but that was thirty years ago and more."

"My old darling," said her husband, as quick with his glance of affection as he had been with that of impatience. And the wife returned the glance with her calm loving look, and again felt that she should like to take away the mother-of-pearl paper-knife, and that this would be a safe time—but she did not.

"Grafton was certainly much shocked at the tone of the society in which he found Dormer," said Mr. Conway, after a pause.

"It speaks well for Ernest," said the wife (a mother is not long after a daughter in seizing one's Christian name), "that he made no secret of his friendships, but at once brought Mr. Grafton into the very heart of the society, though he must have known that Mr. Grafton would repeat all that he heard. You can not say that this was not bold and frank."

"Frank to carelessness, perhaps. He may have thought himself so sure of Magdalen that he did not mind what was said."

"Is not that unkind, William?"

"Well, perhaps it is. But I suppose that I may say that he did not think that Grafton would make any report at all."

"Not after what Ernest knew of Mr. Grafton's affection for Maggie?"

"Did he know of the offer?"

"Certainly. I thought it right to desire Maggie to tell him, though I am sure she would have done so without being advised."

"Then my case is strengthened, because Dormer would feel that a high-minded gentleman would be especially silent about a successful rival."

"Yes, dear, and that is to believe, as I know you do, that Ernest is himself a high-minded gentleman, or he would not feel in that way. Come, papa, do not try to prejudice yourself against him. He appears to me, as he did from the first, to be all that Magdalen can require to make her happy, and that is all which we have to live for, dear."

"Yes."

"You say yes," said his wife, after a pause, "but I know that you continue to torment yourself, and that is not fair to me. I wish I quite understood what you see in Mr. Grafton's story to make you distrustful of Ernest Dormer."

"I will not go so far as to say that I am distrustful. But what Grafton said certainly opened my eyes to a new view of Dormer's character."

"But has it done that? All I can learn, for Mr. Grafton did not choose to talk to me, but kept his confidence for you, which I do not know that I thank him for—"

"Now it is you who are prejudiced. It was surely the most delicate and becoming thing, considering what he had to say, to come to me, or rather to meet me, and relate his impressions."

"Well, may be so. I don't like tale-bearers."

"Do you call a person a tale-bearer who, without any interest in the matter, tells you something that may affect the happiness of your child? Can a woman be just, even by miracle?"

"Yes, William. But I hate tale-bearers, for all that. And answer me this. Had he any thing to say against Ernest himself? A man, and especially a young man, can not help having a few gay acquaintances, and when they get together he can not shut their mouths, can he, or ought he to be answerable for what they say? No doubt that these young men did talk in a very wild way, and perhaps some of them may have been no better than they ought to be, though, as I said, I don't think Mr. Grafton is very capable of judging. But even he, with all his desire to injure Ernest—"

"You have no right to say that, Mary. He loved Magdalen well enough to offer to marry her, and you may fairly credit him with a genuine desire for her welfare."

"I dare say it may be so," replied the wife, "though it does not look like desire for a girl's welfare to sow dissension between her parents and her intended. But did Mr. Grafton accuse Ernest of any thing more than dining in the room where much very profane and improper talk went on?"

"He makes no charge, I tell you—"

"How could Ernest help being there, when the dinner was got up in his honor by others? He had not the inviting of a single guest, except Mr. Grafton, who makes such a grateful return."

"Grafton was not Dormer's guest, but was asked by a Mr. Mangles, with whom he has business connections."

"Well, then, Ernest asks nobody at all; but because a cluster of persons, not of his choice or selection, sit down with him and behave themselves ill, Mr. Grafton is to come down here expressly to make mischief."

"My dear Mary, come down here, as if his father's place were three miles from this house!"

"He did not meet you in his father's place. I tell you that he is a spiteful young man, and that he preserves the memory of his rejection by Magdalen, and is glad to revenge himself; and a nice person he is to be a clergyman! but that is always the way with them—they do mean things because they know that they can not be called to account."

"A speech, Mary, of which you will be heartily ashamed when you come to think over the characters of the clergy whom we know. But you have quite, as becomes a woman, walked away from the real question. It is not whether Grafton behaved from one motive or another in describing what he heard, but whether Ernest Dormer is to be known by his associates, and whether we are to believe that he is an immoral infidel."

"What words to use of Magdalen's intended husband!"

"I did not use them of him—how you women pervert every thing!—but I do say that immorality and infidelity made the talk at that dinner, and the talkers were the select friends of Dormer—the special friends who liked him so well that they got the dinner up. Now, you can't

cavil at that, and in such a matter as Maggie's happiness we ought to let in no cavil at all."

"My dear William, do you think that if I did not believe Ernest to be what he should be I would argue with you a moment, except as to the best means of breaking the match off? But I really can not see that a young man is to be condemned and discarded because his club friends, on a particular occasion, talked foolishly, and wickedly if you will. Perhaps they did it on purpose, for the sake of astonishing Mr. Grafton, and though this would have been very reprehensible, it would have been very like young men."

"I see," said Mr. Conway, with a sort of groan.

This was, as may be supposed, but the sequel of a series of discussions which an affectionate father and mother had held upon a subject so important to them, and to one whom they held dearer than any thing in the world. It will suffice, however, to show the way in which each regarded the approaching marriage. Mr. Conway had more misgivings than his wife; but then it had been his way all through life to vex himself with the contemplation of the possible failure of every scheme to which he had reason to wish success, and he was not the man to abandon that habit when the scheme before him was for the happiness of his only child. His wife had, constitutionally, the opposite habit; and it had been well for Mr. Conway that it was so, or he would have been unhappy instead of restless through life. Fortunate in meeting a helpmate who was so eminently calculated to sweeten his destiny, he had gradually yielded to her influence, and learned to look with her hopeful eyes to an extent which he would not in earlier days have believed possible, and which in moments of solitary murmuring he found himself inclined to call irrational. For there could be no doubt that, intellectually, Mr. Conway was very much the superior of his calm and cheerful wife, nor did she doubt it, though her instincts had served her so much better than his wisdom.

He had been an architect, and had achieved some successes in his art, but at a time when it was not so well understood, or at least not so irritatingly criticised as in our happy day. Had he possessed more confidence in himself and his fortunes he would have pushed his way to fortune, and could then, had complacency been in his nature, have complacently read the information with which he would have been liberally supplied that his Gothic was only tolerable in comparison with his execrable Classic. But though he managed to secure a competence, with more labor than many stupider professional brethren expended upon work that made them rich, he would never have possessed the handsome old house at Naybury, and the means of keeping it, but for his wife. Mary Herbert had loved him when he was in his earlier professional struggles, and though she always denied the fact, with her pleasant laugh, it was believed by Mr. Conway's friends that she had proposed to him, or at least had convinced the fidgety and undecided man that they might safely marry, although her dower was little more than expectations. But she assured him that the expectations would all come right if he would only join her in laughing and waiting. They married, and Mary Conway's quiet confidence in her husband and her good luck soon manifested itself. She made him enter into several competitions, in all of which he assured her that he had not the least chance, and when he had sketched his original plans she refused to allow him to change or modify them, though he almost angrily declared that they could by no possibility succeed. Some of them did succeed, though Mary Conway's sweet temper was sorely tried at the finish of the race. Were an architect allowed twenty years to prepare drawings he would be in a scramble during the last week, and keep his staff at work all the last three nights. This is a law of architect-nature. But when his condition at that time of trial is improved by doubts and despair, and when he is threatening to put his elevations into the fire and rush out of town, and finally proposes to send them in with the motto *Miserrimus*, those about him may be excused some impatience.

Mrs. Conway had to undergo all this kind of vexation; to keep her husband up to his work, to assure him that he was going to make a great success for her (this little touch often told when Conway's face was longest), and that she had heard in society the very strongest opinions that if he worked in earnest he could not fail. She never lost patience or temper, she never reproached him with moral cowardice, she never lost her cheerfulness, and when the most trusty clerk was sent off at the last minute with the competition plans—one need not say that it was within an hour of the midnight at which the reception ended—Mrs. Conway's merry orders to him to return to supper and report that the plans had gone in, were (as he used to declare to his own wife on the second-floor at Pentonville) a reward for all the trouble and anxiety. A man could never sink very deep in the water with such a life-belt round his neck.

In one sense, Mrs. Conway did better than this, though nothing could have been better than her companionship had her husband been a man of more resolve. But as it was, his marriage proved fortunate for him in a way that saved him—and Mary—much exertion in the after-days. It has been said that she had expectations. Mr. Conway, when he canvassed them in conjugal debate, always said, in a melancholy manner, that they would come to nothing—not that he loved her the less on that account. Her uncle John would infallibly marry again and have children; and when uncle John was once reported as on a visit to a family with girls, in the Isle of Wight, Mr. Conway was really almost triumphant at the probable accomplishment of his unfavorable anticipations. Mary Conway smiled and waited, and uncle

John, six months afterward, left her ten thousand pounds by will, and added two more by a codicil which he had signed in the Isle of Wight itself. It may be that this signal success excited Mary Conway to the extent of boxing her melancholy husband's ears and kissing him soundly. Then she went on waiting and smiling, and a cousin of hers, who had influence with a railway company, induced that association to pay about nine times the value of a couple of little fields which Mrs. Conway had inherited from her father. How it was managed is not material to this history, but it is just to state, first, that it was many years ago, when railway people did not act with the scrupulous honesty which now marks all their proceedings; and secondly, that the persons concerned made atonement next month by fighting the just claim of a poor cow-keeper, and cutting his compensation down to such a figure that he dismissed himself from a world in which he saw nothing but ruin. Between the legacy and the purchase-money the Conways were comparatively rich, when the moral of the ten talents came very acceptably to their minds. As they possessed a very good house in London, and money to maintain it, they obtained the house at Naybury and a great deal more money by a providential discovery on the part of an eminent conveyancer, employed by the executors of Mr. Herbert, that a title which another eminent conveyancer had pronounced to be perfect was faulty by reason of something which the former called Discontinuance; but whatever it was, it took Marley House, and its broad acres appurtenant, from an old sea-officer who had nothing else in the world except half-pay, and gave them to Mr. and Mrs. Conway, who had already twenty thousand pounds and more. They were very kind to the old sea-officer, however, and would never let him be moved out of his house until he had revenged himself on fate, with rum, and died in his vengeance. And even smiling Mrs. Conway did not smile when she heard that they might take possession, nor for some time after they had been master and mistress of Marley House. So it will be allowed that she made Mr. Conway an admirable wife, and whether you believe or disbelieve that she had invited him to marry her, it is clear that no better arrangement for his happiness could have been possible. And he owned this to her, and to others, and even to himself, and we often tell others sundry truths which we only half accept in our own minds.

That he was her intellectual superior he never doubted, nor did she. He had been highly educated—had he been of coarser mind he might have done better when a struggling man—and he had read much, and had traveled. But his nature had always prevented his fully availing himself of his advantages. Mrs. Conway, on the other hand, had been carelessly instructed, and finding that by cheerfulness and good-nature she made her way in the world and was liked and loved, she never felt the ambition to cultivate herself for admiration. She had for some years been the affectionate companion of an invalid father, but his society had not tended to develop her faculties, inasmuch as, though few men had handled more books, no man had read fewer than that old bookbinder, Maurice Herbert. His bindings are fought for at the auction to this day, often by men who look as little between them as he did. When old Mr. Herbert died, Mary, who would never have left him in his lifetime, took a very early opportunity of setting Mr. Conway's friends the problem which has been already set forth. She married William Conway, and justly considered that having obtained a husband, it was no business of hers to cultivate any thing except his happiness, and she farmed that glebe right well. A very womanly woman, with a kindly directness of purpose, but not more worldly wisdom than served her to support her husband through a kind of trials against which man should not need support. Perhaps, from circumstances, she had learned to think too highly of the sort of self-assertion which she saw in other men than her husband, but she loved him none the less that it was hers to supply an element lacking in him.

The discussion on Magdalen's marriage was interrupted by the reappearance of Magdalen herself upon the little lawn.

CHAPTER V.

"THEY DO SAY—"

"THAT gathering of yours went off better than might have been expected, Charley," said Mr. Wigram, a few nights after the banquet.

They had dropped into a couple of easy-chairs in the smoking-room, and were the first members who had ascended thither after dinner.

"Yes, well enough. Phelps did his work like a man. As Mangles says, this would be the pleasantest club in London, if it were not for the members."

"He is fastidious, since his election at the Empyrean. By what fluke was that managed, I wonder?" said Mr. Wigram.

"I don't know. Perhaps he was mistaken for somebody else, and his backers had the sense to humor the blunder. Did you notice, by-the-way, that he was trying to edit us, as it were, the other night—cutting across things when he thought any body was going ahead?"

"Most of you were a little on, eh?"

"All of us, and I don't know how it was. I fancy that Mangles did not wish the clerical man to be utterly astounded."

"Then he should not have brought him here. A good clergyman doesn't want us, and we don't want a bad one," said Mr. Wigram, sententiously.

"Nice state of things, when a gentleman who happens to be in orders can't dine with a

dozen of other gentlemen without hearing what he ought not to hear," replied Launceston. "Do you know that I rather liked the way the young fellow came out about Renan? I like to see a man in earnest—push the matches this way."

Mr. Mangles entered.

"Going to ask us whether we are disengaged, as you want to give another dinner, Samuel?" said Mr. Wigram.

"*Pas si bête*," was the editor's gracious reply, as he fed and lit a little meerschaum.

"What did you do with the Reverend Grafton?"

"Mr. Grafton accompanied me to my apartments, accepted my humble hospitality for the night, and departed for his provincial residence on the following morning," replied Mr. Mangles, with affectation of a didactic manner.

"I should like to know what he said about the club," remarked Launceston.

"He said it was very conveniently situated, and that the architecture, though unpretending, was effective."

"Don't be a humbug—was he scared?"

"He did not say so. He may have been scandalized, but he did not say that either," replied Mr. Mangles. "One reason may have been that he was indisposed to be critical at night, and that he went away before I was up in the morning. Ring, Wigram. Some iced water, and the last edition of the *Sun*," he added, to the waiter.

"There's no news," said Launceston. "I wish you wouldn't bring the newspapers up here."

"My dear Charles," replied Mr. Mangles, quietly, "I have the greatest regard for you as an institution, but I have no confidence in your ability to say whether there is or is not any news. You probably mean that there is no telegram stating whether Preposterous or Hippopotamus has won the Witlers' Cup at Muckton races. I am not interested in that national event. I want to see what they have been doing in the House at the morning sitting."

"I wish the House was—well, I wish it was up," said Wigram.

"Are you serious?" said Mr. Mangles, earnestly. "What on earth can the House be to you? I hardly supposed that you knew of its existence. What do you think it is?"

"It is keeping me from leaving England, that's all. The governor has some notion that he ought not to stir until the prorogation. You see," he added, filially, "it is his first session, and he may be excused for thinking Parliament awfully important."

"And then these swells wonder that the misgoverned talk of a revolution," said the editor.

"Swells yourself!" retorted Henry Wigram, actually rising from his chair, and becoming oratorical on the rug. "I think that a revolution would be a very good thing. I am not in the least afraid of one. I wish we had a jolly strong Committee of Public Safety."

"Catiline in shiny boots."

"Very well, and he begs leave to abuse your patience for a minute. I tell you that I should like to see it. Do you believe that a strong government of practical men would allow the present state of things to go on? Do you think that I should have had to sit in a Hansom for twenty minutes in a block at Temple Bar this morning, with monster vans gathering thick and close around me, every body hindering every body else, and all the traffic brought to a halt at a time when minutes are made of gold?"

"Wigram in earnest!" said Launceston. "The world is at an end!"

"Wigram is in earnest," continued that elegant young gentleman, who had quite forgotten to be pensive. "I believe that such a committee would take London in hand, kick all the boards, and vestries, and beadles into infinite space, and do no end of good. I would get up a revolution myself if I could."

"I should like to hear your father on the subject," said Mr. Mangles.

"Yes, a revolution would be hard on the dear old governor," said Henry, "because he is a land-owner, and so I hope it will not come in his time. But what should I care? The new fellows would upset the Church, and I have two brothers in it. Very good. One of them is adored in his parish, because he can lick any fellow in it, and sits up all night with sick babies, and so is the other, because he is their guide and philosopher, adjusts all their disputes, and has driven an attorney to suicide. Both would have a much larger income than they get now. I've no relations in the Army and Navy, but lots of friends, and a revolution would precious soon find plenty of work for them all, for we should be at war with half a dozen despots in six months. As for the Law, the more bulls that run into that old china shop the better, and you know it, Sam Mangles, being a barrister by pretension. We would have a Code Mill."

"I wish you would remember that I am on the committee here, Henry," said Launceston. "I should vote with regret for your expulsion, but I should wipe my eyes and do my duty."

"Then," said the reckless Henry, "there's the National Debt. I have no money in the funds, and nobody can get at my income. I should be *impavidus* even if a revolutionary committee sat to consider the Debt, and how much of it was incurred in necessary war, and how much to please robbers and jobbers like that chap up there."

That chap up there was John, Duke of Marlborough—a very fine portrait.

It is due to Mr. Wigram's friends to say that these atrocious sentiments were deemed unworthy of argument, and that Mr. Mangles requested the orator to sit down, and desist from nonsense.

"Nonsense, if you like," said Henry Wigram, again subsiding into his seat, "but you will hear more of the same kind."

"What an extraordinary weak mind you must have, dearest Henry!" said Charles Launceston. "All this came into your little soul this morning, because you lost a few minutes that were not of the least use to yourself or any body else. Instead of plotting revolution, you should have recited little hymns to yourself. I am sure that you must have been taught many when you were a child."

"I hate a block," said Mr. Mangles, "though it does not prompt me to revolution. The enraging thing is that the grievance must be removed before you can get to the place where it was created, so you have nobody to revile. Has either of you seen Ernest Dormer since the dinner?"

"I have not," said Launceston, "and if he is wise he is gone off to look after his own interests at Naybury."

"What makes you say that?" said Mr. Mangles, rather sharply.

"Because I think that your friend the parson will do him no particular good there."

"If you call him my friend, you might remember that my friends do not do unhandsome things, Launceston."

"Don't be tart, my dear Mangles. I am not in the habit of speaking carelessly about any body I care for."

"I was not asking you to care for Mr. Grafton, but merely reminding you that I brought him to the dinner."

"Yes," said Charley Launceston, who was good temper itself, "and he sat by you during the greater part of the time, and you can answer for his having been all that could be wished—and a little more," he added, for nothing could make him serious. "But you were not near him during the last hour, for some of us changed seats, and he came between Milwarden and me."

"I saw that," said Mangles, "and I thought I observed that he scarcely spoke during that time."

"Not to us."

"To whom?"

"To the Reverend Edward Grafton, unless he had spiritual manifestations, and was conversing with some supernatural party. Don't look savage—you may be quite sure that we made no fun of him, and that neither from Milwarden nor me is any body except yourself likely to hear a word on the subject. You, as his friend, are perhaps entitled to know that another person who was at the table is certainly not regarded by him as a friend."

"I don't want to hear any thing about this," said Mr. Wigram, plaintively, "and it is too bad to make me get up and go to the other end of the room."

"Do nothing of the kind, Wigram," said Mr. Mangles. "I don't quite understand Launceston's reason for telling me this."

"Don't you?" said Launceston. "Then I will make you understand in a very few words. I like Ernest Dormer excessively, and I fancied that you, Mangles, cared a deal about him."

"So I do."

"Then you may as well know that another person of your acquaintance not only does not care about him, but sat grinding his teeth and rolling his eyes, and saying—of course he did not know what he was saying—that he had Dormer on the hip, and would put a lion in his path, and generally signifying that if he had an enemy in the world it was the man on whom you had been expending your best eloquence, and deuced well you did it, too."

"A confounded fool!" said Mr. Mangles. He seldom used italics in print, but he spoke them often, and these words were strongly underscored.

"That, at least," said Launceston.

"No, no," said Samuel Mangles, at once discarding a certain cold manner, and going up to the other with the sole purpose of speaking earnestly. "I assure you that he is nothing more. I have every reason to believe Grafton a gentleman. I say this to you two fellows in all sincerity. I have known a good deal of him. He does not live in the world, and he had taken far too much wine; but I assure you that he is not a bad fellow."

"My dear Sam," said Charley Launceston, "a tenth part of such an assurance from you would be enough; but you need not be angry with me for telling you an incident of the table."

"Angry, my dear fellow, not a bit. But your story set me thinking."

"Yes," said Henry Wigram, in his pensive voice. It was not much to say, but both the men knew him, and heard something more than a mere assent.

"Expound that word, Wigs," said Charley.

"I should hold my tongue, perhaps," replied Mr. Wigram, "as Mangles may think that I, too, am trespassing on his preserves."

"Stuff!" said Mr. Mangles, rekindling the meerschaum which he had allowed to go out. "You are one of the best of good fellows, Wigram, and you know that I think so."

"Good," said Henry Wigram, "and I am going to say very little indeed, the less that we shall have an irruption of the unrighteous directly. I, like Charley, am awfully fond of Ernest Dormer, and imagine that if this ferocious young clergyman should do what he menaces it might not be a case that would justify Ernest in jumping over a bridge."

"If he should break off the marriage with Miss Conway, do you mean?" said Launceston.

"Yes, I mean that, and I see by Sam Mangle's eye that he knows, or thinks he knows what I mean."

"I am not sure that I do," said Mr. Mangles, in a voice of discomposure.

"Now you have spoken, I am quite sure you do," said Henry Wigram, quietly.

Launceston looked at each of them in turn, wonderingly at first, and then—Charley was a gentleman in every sense of the word, but (such is the training of life) no old maid could have got more directly on the scent of scandal.

"A very charming girl—most respectable parents—plenty of money to come," he said, slowly, eying his friends as a spirit-rapper eyes his dupes to catch the least gesture.

"All that," said Henry Wigram.

"What more does a man want?" asked Launceston, as a matter of form.

"Some men want more, but some men are exacting," said Wigram.

Mr. Mangles, who was standing, laid his hand on the arm of Launceston, and made him approach Wigram. Then leaning between them, he said to the latter:

"You perhaps know more than I do. Now I will not ask you how this is. But I declare to you solemnly, that I have, at present, no knowledge that would justify me in telling Dormer to hesitate."

"And you know Dormer better than I do," said Wigram.

"I don't quite understand."

"It is an awkward thing to say, because I gather that he is your intimate friend. I only say that I like him exceedingly, so far as I know him."

"Speak out, Henry," said Charley Launceston. "It's understood that you speak in the interest of a man we all like, and Sam Mangles waives all points of feeling?"

"Go on," said Mr. Mangles.

"In saying that you know Ernest Dormer better than I do," said Henry Wigram, "I meant that—that you might be a more adequate judge of—well, damn it! there—that you might know whether it suited him to be fastidious. I know nothing of him but that he is a very pleasant fellow, who was said to have been involved."

"Put the case, Wigram," said Launceston, "that you are Ernest Dormer. What would you wish a real friend to do at this instant?"

Four or five noisily-talking men came into the room, and Mangles launched a wish among them, which it may be hoped was divided among too many to do any harm to any.

Wigram's reply was whispered.

CHAPTER VI.

MAGDALEN.

The parrot received a gentle pat on his gray head, and was transferred from his cage to his stand, the Persian cat was conscious of the mildest and most Camilla-like touch from a little foot on his large and outspread tail, and the dispenser of those kindly recognitions glided to her garden-chair on the lawn before the breakfast-room window. Parents usually contrive to be proud of any sort of child belonging to them, and it is not for us to find fault with the arrangements of nature, however little we may be able to justify them by the rules of ordinary reason, but no excuse could be needed by William and Mary Conway for their adoration of their daughter Magdalen.

With fear and trembling, in a day when ugly heroines are the fashion, we are compelled to own that Magdalen Conway was beautiful. It is not our fault. It could be wished that she had come under that window and looked up with eyes capable of shining with lurid light, and that in the mean time her unhealthily white skin, yellow hair, and over-red lips, should remind the beholder of a lady-like Ghoul who mixed among the very best dead. Or, failing these attractions, it would have been satisfactory to be able to say that Miss Conway had not a single really good feature, that her hair was a bad color, and that her form, though it might develop into comeliness, was incomplete and even awkward. We venerate the genius that purposely selects an unfavorable type of woman and works it up into an ideal of the terrible or of the lovable. But having no especial fondness for trouble for trouble's sake, and disclaiming the power that succeeds best with objectionable material, we are content to accept a gracious instead of an ungracious type of young ladyhood, and with every apology for striking into a new path, we introduce a beautiful girl as one in whom it may be possible to take an interest. We admit that the type is commonplace, for English girls have a habit of being handsome, and possibly therefore the skill of an artist may be more severely taxed in dealing with a specimen of what may be seen in full beauty in every drawing-room, than it might have been in presenting an image which should at once strike by its infrequency. But the die is cast, and like Paris we reject the haughty fiend Juno, and the ugly incarnation of wisdom, Minerva, and kneel at the feet of Venus and loveliness, a classical illustration about as much out of fashion as the kind of heroine whom we have chosen.

Let us look at Magdalen, at least until she shall have deserved other regards, with a gaze of kindness like that which fell upon her from the window where stood those who had no such treasure on earth. What they saw was a girl of about twenty years of age—it would be prettier to say a girl who had seen twenty summers, but Magdalen had seen twenty winters too, or she would not have had that healthy tint which is due to the bracing atmosphere of the rougher months. Fair, save in the poet's sense, you would scarcely call her, for her complexion was of that hue which sometimes warms into a richness foreign to conventional fairness. Yet Magdalen was not entitled to the proud honors of the brunette. Hers were the English cheek and brow, and hers was the wealth of chestnut hair, just now in full luxuriance, and easily turned to any fashion into which the soft, white, pliant hands chose to mould it. What we call the Saxon character was most distinctively that of Magdalen's beauty, and the light morning-dress she wore did not conceal the well-developed form, or altogether deny proof that the arms were rounded and white. It is well, not less for the future than for the present, that a

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figure like this should have the advantage of height, and Magdalen Conway was somewhat tall, though the exquisite proportion of her form did not at first impress you with the fact. The charm of the features would have been powerful, even had they lacked much of the expression which they possessed; but Magdalen had two very strong points of expression, and the possession of either, by a girl, justifies a hesitating admirer in an instant offer. One was a smile which lighted up over the entire face in a moment, and disappeared with the occasion, not lingering like a clown's grin that does not exactly know how to take itself out of the way any more than the clown knows how to take himself out of a room. The other was an even more charming little frown, which had nothing to do with temper, but rather expressed surprise and puzzled one for a second, until, like a discord in music, it should be delightfully resolved, and make way for the smile that was waiting at the lips. Look for either of these signs, my

single young brother, and if you find either—and still more, if you find both—drop on your manly knees and mention your income and adoration.

Such was Magdalen Conway to outward view. And we have written in vain if that beautiful English-looking girl have not, at first sight, established herself well in the heart of the reader. Whether she confirm her hold on that fortress, or whether she be dislodged with ignominy, it shall not be said that the strong-hold surrendered to an unworthy custodian.

"Put up the sunshade, there's a dear child," was the first exhortation from the window, and we know who issued that warning.

"Very well, mamma. But I thought you heard somebody say that a slight touch of sunburn was often very pretty," said Magdalen, laughing.

"Somebody talks nonsense, dear."

"But you mustn't say so, mamma, and I must not listen to such disrespectful remarks." And the sunshade was playfully held before the face, as if to shut out evil counsel. It rose again the next minute, and Magdalen said:

"Are we very early this morning? I went in to see after my letter, but that tiresome old postman has not been round."

"Quite impossible, of course, that he should have no letter," said Mr. Conway.

"Quite, papa," said Magdalen, with some real and some pretended solemnity. "But if such a dreadful thing should occur, I hope that you are ready to start off for London by the next train, and ascertain what has happened. Please tell me what o'clock it is."

"Where is your own watch, Miss?"

"That is gone to London, papa, and it is in very safe hands, and you are not to ask any more questions about it."

"I don't think that you would change that gift for any other," said Mr. Conway, as usual ready with an idea that annoyed him.

"Why, you know I would not, papa. Not for Charles the First's watch that he gave away on the scaffold, if they offered it me. I don't think I can say more than that, can I? But you deserve to be punished for daring to think of such a thing, and you shall be, too."

And Maggie darted at the window, seized her offending parent by the dressing-gown, and dragging him forward, kissed him on both cheeks.

"Let me ever hear you say any thing of that kind again," she said, menacingly, as, slightly flushed with the little performance, she stood for a moment, holding up her finger, before returning to her seat.

"Oh! where is that letter?" she added; "I am sure that there is something going on in London. Papa, has the Queen appointed a new Postmaster-General who doesn't know how to sort the letters properly? The old one ought to show him how."

"I have not read any thing of the kind, my dear," said her father; "but of course, as I said, any thing is more probable than that Mr. Dormer should miss a post?"

"Any thing. He never misses posts. And he has not missed this post," cried the girl, starting up. "There is dear old Edwards trying to ring—once, twice—he will succeed this time—there. No, I will not run to meet it, Sir—I see what you mean. I will have my letters brought to me, like a young lady."

Perhaps, however, she would not have waited very long for this one. But a pretty parlor-maid, preternaturally alert, of course, in such business, was the next minute on the lawn, bringing Magdalen a letter. It was a good little bit of comedy to see Miss Conway sit gracefully down in her chair and affect to take the letter deliberately, under six eyes whose owners all knew exactly how glad she was to receive it.

Ernest Dormer had made them laugh one evening at a description of the stage conventionality in regard to a letter. The late Mr. Warde's reception of the warning epistle addressed to King Gustavus the Third at the Masked Ball was the master-piece in that way, and of Ernest's imitation of this celebrated absurdity Magdalen, raising her eyelids and half turning her pretty head, and gently striking the letter, held at arm's-length, with the back of her right hand, gave her saucy little reminiscence.

"A letter for Me. From whom can it Be?"

But she could not complete the theatrical picture by utterly discharging all meaning from the smile with which, in further copy of the original, she proceeded ostentatiously to break up the letter.

Her parents applauded, and discreetly withdrew to leave her to enjoy her lover's dispatch.

How many a letter has, during the period of life when we care about the way in which people write to us, changed our mental atmosphere without our being able to say why! We have expected words of kindness and love, and we have received them; and yet we have not had what we wanted.

Magdalen Conway read her letter, and of course read it again, and on the second reading fancied that she liked it less than on the first. Yet she vainly tried to fix upon any passages which could justly disappoint her; and this was the more disturbing, because when we can once lay hold of a fault in one whom we love, we can easily argue ourselves into the belief that it is a merit. But an intangible grievance is very grievous. The letter was really affectionate, and not without a warmer attribute. It would have been difficult for a man of refinement to write better or more fittingly to a refined girl. Of course it lacked the idiotic iterations with which a stupid person seeks to impart conviction of a clumsy fondness, but there was no absence of the passionate assurances dear alike to all women. And when the lover rose from his knees and spoke of the outside world he had delightful things to say, and he said them wittily and well. He ended with what was apparently a natural and ardent expression of ten-

derness, and it would have been very hard for any man, except a poet in love, and in a good temper, to have mended the letter in Magdalen's hand.

Yet, when she had read it for the third time, she did not smile, nor did her eyes moisten with a gentler pleasure. She left the lawn, bestowing no more attention on her favorites, and went to her room. Soon afterward she left the house to attend to a duty which she seldom neglected. She went to visit the sick and the poor in Naybury.

Magdalen had acquired this habit in different scenes and under different influences from those which now surrounded her. For reasons which may hereafter occur to the reader, Miss Conway's visitations of her humbler fellow-creatures were conducted upon a different principle from that which seems to actuate a large number of ladies who bounce into the dwellings of the poor, and appear to be less like angels of mercy than members of a jury for examining moral and religious weights and measures, and fining and rebuking delinquents. Nor, again, did she regard the poor as a country gentleman very properly regards his pheasants—as articles which induce resort to a wholesome occupation, and of which the preserves ought therefore to be duly attended to, while the birds must not be made too tame and familiar. Magdalen had some odd ideas upon the subject of poverty, and if she had argued them out, even with a less stern person than a mere political economist, she would have found much difficulty in supporting them; but then the subject was one on which she always refused to argue. Unless one had the key to her views they were very inconsistent. For, while she saw in poverty a thing to reverence, and by no means to patronize, far less to treat as a nuisance, Miss Conway was always rejoiced when any of those whom she befriended could emerge from indigence, and, either by self-help or the help of others, could assume independence. The first of these views is not unknown to thousands of kindly-natured women, who, however, can not combine it with the second, and have a definite conviction that a certain class was ordained to be "always with us," and therefore is an institution of a sacred character, and not to be uprooted by private or public endeavor. How Magdalen managed to reconcile her notions, or whether she ever sought to reconcile them by any mental process, may be known when we know her better. It is more to the purpose to say that she always did her work alone—asked no aid out of her own household, and steadily declined to become a member of either the Naybury Dorcas Society or the Talithacumi Young Ladies' District Visiting Association.

To-day Magdalen set out to visit three or four poor persons who lived on the frontier of the parish, which was extensive. Their cottages were indeed separated by two fields from the end of a straggling suburb of Naybury. More prosaic homes it would be impossible to describe than the row of little houses known as Trafalgar. They had been so called from a tradition, probably unfounded, that the timbers of which they were built had once been those of one of the ships that fought under Nelson. The cabins were "not" convenient (to quote Bobadil), but they were not worse than thousands of houses which are erected by greedy men, with a conscientious simplicity of meaning in the matter of architecture, the meaning being to spend as little as possible in the building, and to screw as much as possible out of the tenant. The rule is applied in the case of edifices of a higher order, but it is nowhere so honestly carried out as in the dwellings of the English poor. Builders of rows of bad and showy villas for persons of moderate means who wish to seem richer than they are may do much in the way of flimsy and vamped work, and may greatly neglect sanatory arrangements, but are compelled to make some sacrifices to appearances, to affix some vulgar ornamentation, to parody with some pretense of imitation the comforts of a real house. But in the homes of the poor there is no such sham. The dirty little builder who has scraped and jobbed until he has acquired the means to erect his hovels, selects the worst materials and puts them together in the worst way, and the helplessness of those who have no capital at all is never so signally manifested as against the tyranny of those who have only a little. Shame and character being out of the question, the landlord-and-tenant question here is happily adjusted without the aid of other law than that which puts in a distress. Meantime the builder hoards and scrapes, and dies comparatively rich and worth going into mourning for, unless the Nemesis has come upon him in the way of a larger speculation, under the advice of an attorney who is the minister of the displeasure of the gods. Meantime, too, two or three generations of the helpless poor have become lean and rheumatic paupers under his rotten roofs and over his stagnant drains.

With reluctance one introduces such features into a picture, and the only excuse is that they are in the original scene. It was to a set of houses of the architectural order of Squalor that Miss Conway went out on the day she had received Ernest Dormer's letter. She made no sign of being on an errand of charity—no footman marched behind her, privately cursing at being obliged to carry a basket at all, and a basket for such creatures as those, and a basket containing articles of which the kitchen had been, as he might say, robbed. Nor did Miss Conway, with a profounder pride of humility, herself bear any food or medicine to her poor friends at Trafalgar. It would doubtless have looked well to have done so, and many persons who inhabited the houses in her road would have seen her good works, and perhaps have admired her. It was not her way. Of one of whom it is wished that the reader should think well, the writer must record with regret that she had formed an idea that the poor generally know what they want better than any one out of their sphere

can know for them, and that they prefer to spend your charity money for themselves. Magdalen carried her heterodoxy to the extent of giving coin instead of broken meat, and she persevered in this course in spite of awful warnings and illustrations. It had been proved, nay, the shameless old woman had daringly owned, that Mary Jull had bought tobacco for herself and her crippled husband with some of Miss Conway's money, and that the evil old creatures smoked it in concert, until, as Mrs. Bulliman (an inveterate and admirable visitor of the poor) remarked, the place smelled like a tap-room, and she herself was accused by her impertinent school-boy son of having adopted a short pipe in private. That Dick Rusper, being unable to walk, in consequence of the fall from the haystack, had sent his boy to the Red Star for brandy, which he could have paid for only from means furnished by Miss Conway. But, worst of all, when the traveling circus visited Naybury, Peter Widgeon had taken his wife and all their little Widgeons to see the horses, though it was notorious that Peter had been out of work for a long time, and owed money at the baker's. This profligate Peter, who had dared to lay out money on pleasure while a debt remained unpaid, had been relieved out of the purse of Magdalen Conway. As Sir Richard Salvington had well observed at a magistrates' meeting, those who fostered the follies of the poor were responsible for their crimes; and it is probable that he would often have attended again, and made many other admirable observations, but that failing, after a desperate struggle, to bribe himself into the House, he had been compelled to hide himself in an upper chamber, like the earlier Christians, for fear of the Jews. All these things, and many more, were known to Miss Conway, yet on the present occasion she had provided herself with silver.

Irregularities might have been pardoned to her by the refined reader if Magdalen had selected interesting pets. There is something very graceful in certain groups with which Art has made us acquainted, and with which we should much like to know how Art originally made itself acquainted. Nothing can be more touching, and at the same time more elegant, than a picture of a daintily-dressed lady stepping prettily over the clean white threshold of the well-kept cottage, and tendering a hymn-book to the neat and courtesying mother, while handsome though plebeian children, with their hair agreeably combed, look so gratefully at the lady as to have no eyes for the benevolent footman who comes behind with loaves and fruit. Perhaps there were no such cottages in Naybury, or perhaps Miss Conway did not distribute hymn-books. It was not to the poor of whom the well-to-do tradesmen said that they were very worthy persons, and charity was not thrown away upon them—it was not to the poor of whom Mrs. Bulliman and her Dorcasians said that they knew their places, and respected their betters, that Miss Magdalen usually went. She not only left this class of persons to the care of others, but it is sad to add that she rather eschewed all the interesting creatures for whom the religious part of Naybury exerted itself. Especially was Magdalen Conway's irregular mind exhibited when she had yielded to her mother's request to go, one evening, to good Mrs. Bulliman's, to hear the conversation of Mr. Jacob Jackano, a converted Hebrew, who, Mrs. Bulliman said, had some sweet experiences which she had been privileged to hear. Miss Conway went with her mamma, but was so far from being edified by the utterances of the interesting convert that she was unkind enough to say (after being severely pressed and cross-examined by her hostess), that she did not believe him sincere. For a long time this cruel judgment was held in memory by the Bulliman circles, and Magdalen caused much head-shaking during the Dorcas meetings. But the subject dropped after a London newspaper had been read in Naybury. That journal revealed, without the delicacy which in France gives even a criminal the screen of initials, that Mr. Jackano had been applying the process of conversion to certain valuable securities which, in the simplicity of his new faith, he had probably supposed were common to all Christian men, and that for his ignorance of the thirty-eighth article of the Church he had gone into bondage. But when she met the Bullimans Magdalen never mentioned the trial, though she had read it aloud to her father. What can be said of a nature which had so little impulse of self-vindication?

Those whom she had to-day to visit were certainly not of the washed-and-grateful order of poor. Her first call was upon Mary Jull, the wife of the cripple, and the smoker of tobacco.

"I knock at their doors always," Mrs. Bulliman had said.

"Certainly, we owe them that respect," Magdalen had replied.

"Oh, my dear, not on that account, certainly. We should do very wrong to try to impart to them the habits of a different class of society. I knock, and I advise you to do the same, for a very different reason. And I always call out my name before I enter."

"Might I ask why?" said Miss Conway, smiling.

"Because, my dear, who knows what they may be doing? I called on young Tom Rix soon after he had married Ellen Davis, and not only was he smoking his pipe, but his wife was sitting on his knee! I do not think that Ellen Rix was likely to do that again after the lecture I gave her, but it was a warning to me, and I have never since gone into a house without knocking."

"But is there any thing wrong in a wife's sitting on her husband's knee while he smokes?" asked Magdalen, quietly. "If she does not mind the smell of the tobacco, I do not see why she should not. You have a very fine picture in your dining-room, by one of the great masters, and it represents exactly such a scene, wife,

smoke, and all, and Mr. Bulliman kindly pointed out its merits to me."

"My dear Miss Conway," was the reply, and it must have implied all the necessary arguments, as Mrs. Bulliman, who was a very clever woman, made no further answer.

However, for her own reasons, and not the matron's, Magdalen knocked at the door of the Julls.

"Come in, miss," was the croaked response.

"Then you knew who it was, Mrs. Jull," said Miss Conway, smiling, as she entered the squalid den.

She called the old creature Mrs. Jull, by-the-way. Mrs. Bulliman never gave titles, at least to her inferiors, and had a text about it, which somehow was clearly explained as not to the purpose when Lord Yarrington and the Master of Glenlivet visited them during their Highland sojourn. Mrs. Bulliman always addressed her poor by their baptismal names. It was usually either forgiven or tolerated; but she had been frightfully scandalized once, when a washer-woman, in an advanced stage of intoxication, had replied to the lady's

"How are you, Sarah?"

"Well, and if you come to that, how are you, Maria?"

The wretched woman had, with the treachery of her order, availed herself of the knowledge acquired through her professional acquaintance with Mrs. Bulliman's linen. But this painful incident did not teach the lady to give the poor matrons upon whom she bestowed her tautological polysyllabic tracts the title of which the working-man's wife is particularly proud.

"I knowd your step, miss, let alone your knock, and they are both very welcome to a poor old woman."

Now, she was a canting poor old woman, and her speech implied a lie, for her husband, the cripple, had seen Miss Conway coming, and had requested his wife (enforcing his request with a reference to her spiritual future), to put out her pipe, which Mrs. Jull had not done.

"And the rheumatism, I hope that is better, Mrs. Jull?"

"No, miss, and never will be; but I hope to bear all things patient as are sent for our good, though we don't see it with our carnal eyes."

"We are not to bear any thing that we can cure, Mrs. Jull, or why have we got the sense to know how to cure it? Has the doctor seen you lately?"

"Yes, miss, he have seen me, but you know what doctors are."

"I do know, Mrs. Jull," said Magdalen, gently. "I know that they are the kindest and the most patient men in the world, and the only people who are always trying to do good."

"I say nothing against them, miss. I suppose they are like other people, and know what's good for themselves. When you are ill, miss, which I hope and pray it may be few and far between, I dare say the doctor's patient enough, and hears all you have to say, and proud and happy he ought to be to do so, which is only his duty, being well paid for it. But it is another thing when they're paid by the lump."

"You must not say that about Mr. Beccles, because you do him wrong, though you don't mean it, I am sure. His rich patients complain that he runs away from them to look after the Union."

"Yes, miss, do they? And so they grudge us the only comfort we get, which is the doctor's visit. Well, well!"

At this moment a significant growl from Mrs. Jull's crippled husband warned her that if she did not assume a more befitting manner, and avoid offending the young lady, he might have something to say thereafter.

"I really did not know you were there, Jull," said Magdalen. "The sun is so bright outside that I went right up to your wife without seeing you."

"All right, miss," said Jull, who was not a bad fellow, deducting his habit of correcting his wife too emphatically. "It's kind of you to come and see us, and we take it kind, though the old woman grumbles like—"

Mr. Jull was about, possibly, to use a simile which his judgment told him might be out of taste, and he mended his manners by spoiling his sentence.

"Like she oughtn't. She's no worse nor no better than ordinary. If you'd look, miss, at that wall there, at the back, you'd see that it wasn't likely. No, not there, miss, the air and sun comes in at the door a bit, and dries us like, but over there."

Yes, Magdalen looked at the wall, and perceived that the ordinary grime of the cottage of this kind actually glistened, and that near the roof, and out of the blackness, drops of wet sparkled. Some former tenant had sought to improve things by pasting up paper, but it had all gone, of course, except a few scraps on which color, nearly washed out, showed feebly.

"I did think I see a slug a while ago," said Mr. Jull, cheerily, and as a game-keeper might have told his pretty mistress that he thought he had seen a hare on the lawn. "But I wasn't sure, and so I held my tongue, as it would only have been another grievance for the old woman."

"It ought to be put in order," said Miss Conway. "I will ask my father to speak to your landlord."

"Please don't do that, miss," said Jull, earnestly.

"Why not? Surely he ought not to let you live in a place which is positively dangerous."

"You don't know the ins and the outs, miss," said Mr. Jull, "and it's no good that you should trouble yourself about it."

"It is no trouble, and if it were it would be a duty."

"You mean it kind, miss, but please don't do it," repeated Jull. "Us'll get on well enough. We are used to it. And I've nothing to say against slugs, if it was a slug.

They don't bite, and in some countries I have heard are thought not that bad for eating, though I can't go so far as that."

"What rubbish are you talking to the lady," said Mrs. Jull, "and her time precious?"

"I should be much happier, Mrs. Jull, if I saw the way to getting something done for you here. This is hot weather, and yet there is slimy damp in your cottage. What must it be in the winter?"

"Jull is not too wise, miss, but he speaks right in this, and please not to say any thing. What a lady is pleased to give us out of her great goodness and kindness is heartily welcome, but we don't want nothing said about us."

Mr. Jull's growl indicated his distaste for this last speech.

"Well," said Magdalen, "I should have been glad to do something. But you have a right to say how you will be helped."

She placed some silver in the old woman's hand.

"The Lord reward you, miss," said Mrs. Jull, "and may you—"

Magdalen's hand stopped the benediction.

"And I have a right," said Miss Conway, smiling, "to say how I will be thanked. Get yourself some new flannel, Mrs. Jull. And if tobacco comforts you, Jull, it seems to me that you ought to have it, for it must be very miserable to one who was so active as you were to be confined to his seat."

And she actually showed her unfitness to be a lady visitor by giving Mr. Jull money avowedly to buy tobacco.

"He'd better let me buy him a good book, miss, as might make him a better man," said Mrs. Jull.

"At all events, I am sure that you will do what he asks you," said Magdalen, firmly. "And now I must wish you good-by. Mind what I said about the flannel, Mrs. Jull. Good-by to you both!"

Magdalen went out, and the couple held their tongues for some little time.

"Flannel!" said Mrs. Jull, with a scoff of ample meaning.

"Yes, I know your sort of flannel, and what sort of a measure it's measured with," said her husband. He then proceeded to some unfavorable criticisms upon the way in which she had talked to Miss Conway; but though these were perfectly just in themselves, and, sentimentally, were not in excess of the affectionate counsel which a husband is bound to offer to a wife when he thinks that she is in error, the language in which they were conveyed was so apart from that of this periphrastic age, and so very direct, to say nothing of garnishings, zoological and theological, that it may suffice to record that Mr. Jull gave his wife what she subsequently termed a most thundering blowing up. Finally, she bought tobacco, and they smoked the pipe of peace, but no Naybury draper could testify to a sale of flannel to the ungrateful old heathen.

Magdalen, whose sense of humor was one of her unwomanly merits, would not have failed, in other circumstances, to appreciate the ludicrous part of the little scene between the Julls. But to-day she was in no mirthful spirit. She was doing what she considered to be her duty, but she extracted no pleasure from it save that which arose from the reflection that she had not permitted her own feelings to prevent her from giving what was due to others. It is not necessary to dwell upon this proof that she had very little true sensibility. Otherwise, of course, she would have betaken herself to her chamber and some afflicting novel of passion, and left the poor to take care of themselves until she should be in a frame to lower herself to their small and paltry sorrows. Imagine a real heroine ministering to a pauper's rheumatism when her own soul was disquieted within her!

The second visit to-day was to a cottage into which it requires moral courage to conduct the virtuous reader. Except that it would, perhaps, be cowardly to leave Magdalen to pay this visit alone, the temptation to slur the detail would be almost irresistible. For there are some things which we have all agreed not to talk about. The system of refusing to take notice of these things can not be said to have exactly succeeded, as those wretched newspapers, which obstinately refuse to comply with the ignoring convention, prove to us daily, in the coarsest manner. But we can, to a considerable degree, exclude such matters from our observation. The writer of fiction has no right to complain that such is the rule, when, in exchange for the surrender of subjects of every day's presentation, he is generously allowed and encouraged to exert his best skill in the delineation of crimes which are of rare occurrence. While he is permitted to describe good society as embellished by poisoners, forgers, and seventh-commandment breakers, he must be unreasonable indeed if he murmurs that he must say nothing, except in elegant poetry, about vices of other kinds. Still, if persons like Magdalen Conway will hold that charity never shuts her eyes to misery, how can the historians of those persons escape from the unwelcome task of chronicling inelegant eccentricity? Briefly as it can be told, therefore, it must be told that Magdalen proceeded from the cottage of Mr. and Mrs. Jull to that occupied by a personage to whom the nominal honor of matronhood could not be accorded, and whom, therefore, Miss Conway could not offend in addressing her by her Christian name. Nor did the fact that there was one other occupant of the cottage, who had no Christian name at all, but had not lived long enough to know his need of one, prevent Miss Conway from making kindly and pitying inquiries here, or from offering, in addition to money, some advice, which was not ungraciously received by a sadly wicked person. Miss Conway did not advise this person to take herself, and the unfortunate little blue-eyed creature to whom she clung so unjustifiably, into the home provided for such people by the involuntary charity of the district, but made some other sugges-

tions, which were not without fruit in after-days. There was no loud gratitude expressed here, for it is difficult for a woman to offer loud thanks when she is sobbing over a sick baby; but Magdalen did not feel that she had been unthankfully treated, or that she had been contaminated by a blessing from an unblessed woman.

The third and last visit which Miss Conway had intended to make would have been as duly paid as the others but for an interruption which was unexpected and unwelcome. As she knocked at a cottage door about fifty yards further on Edward Grafton opened it from within.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CURATE OF SAXBURY.

"GOOD-MORNING, Miss Conway," said the young clergyman, his color rising as he raised his hat.

Magdalen's acknowledgment of his salutation was rather formal. At no moment was she particularly desirous to meet Mr. Grafton, and at that moment his appearance was especially unwelcome.

"Good-morning," she said, and at once looked round for the inhabitant of the cottage, intending to imply that she desired no conversation with the clergyman.

"You come on your usual errand of benevolence," he said, "but I fear it will be useless. Widow Faunt is a strange person, and to-day she has gone away, it seems, leaving her door unfastened. I could get no notice of my knocking, so I came in, but she is certainly not here. But her ways surprise nobody."

"Have you inquired of any of her neighbors?"

"Yes, but nobody knows any thing about her. She is not a popular person among them, as you may perhaps be aware."

Magdalen did not know what to do. If she remained Mr. Grafton would probably remain with her, and if she went away he would as probably walk with her, and she desired neither attention. She wished that she had a fourth pensioner in Trafalgar, that she might have disembarrassed herself of her companion by going into another cottage. On the whole, she thought that Mr. Grafton might least like to wait, so she said:

"I will stay a little time and see whether she returns."

Miss Conway took a seat just outside the cottage, on a small bench, screened from the view of the neighbors on the left by a hedge which by some marvel had not been cut up for firewood by any needy occupant of the place. On the right there were no other houses, and the view was over a large piece of the flat Naybury nightmare landscape.

There was no seat for him unless he had sat down in closer proximity to the young lady than courtesy permitted.

"Pray do not let me detain you," she said, perceiving that he lingered. "Your time is valuable. I wish to see the poor woman, as I may not be able to come again very soon."

"I suppose not," he said, in an odd voice.

As he had little right to suppose any thing about her, and less to express his suppositions in that tone, Magdalen made no reply, but took out a small book from her pocket. For the moment she did not proceed to the broader hint of opening the volume, though she felt much inclined to do so.

"Might I look at your book?" said the Reverend Mr. Grafton.

He had known her a long time, certainly, and a comparative stranger might have made the request in a playful manner. But Mr. Grafton's manner was not playful, and there had been relations between them which had made him neither friend nor stranger exactly. So Magdalen felt the request to be an impertinence.

"No, I must not show it," she replied, gently. "It has some writing in it not intended for any body to see but myself."

A well-bred man would not, in the circumstances, have asked to see the book, but, if he had been led into the mistake, would have extricated himself graciously. But Edward Grafton did not just then remember social routine.

"I understand," said the pertinacious young clergyman, significantly. "I make no doubt that the notes, if not valuable, are very interesting to Miss Conway."

"I said nothing about notes," replied Magdalen, forcing her voice to a coldness which suited it very ill. "If he speaks to me again," she said to herself, "I declare I will begin to read."

But he could not, or would not, see that her not beginning was only a proof of her reluctance to seem rude.

"That is not one of your grandfather's famous bindings," said Mr. Grafton. "His good taste would have revolted at those splashes of gold and ill-matched colors."

Perhaps so; but Magdalen was in no humor to accept a compliment to her ancestor at the expense of the person who had given her the little volume. She replaced the book in her pocket without reply, and looked out into the distance as if to discover the Widow Faunt.

"I would wait," said Mr. Grafton, "if I thought there were any chance of her coming, but she can not be reckoned upon. Usually one may be sure that this kind of person will be found at home about this hour, for the lower class think that the world is at an end if they are not at their meals at the usual time."

"The poor work hard," replied Miss Conway, "and I dare say that they are glad to get to their meals. But I have begged you not to wait."

"You prefer that I should not?"

"I am sure that you have claims on your time, Mr. Grafton."

"Or that I ought to have," he replied, almost rudely.

Again Magdalen opposed to impertinence the safest defense of all. Talk of Medusa's head—what shield chills an excited adversary like what may be called aggressive silence?

"You might remind me, too," he went on, but in a milder tone, "that I am out of my parish, as it does not come nearer to us than that second fence there, and also that I am trespassing upon ground which is already better occupied."

Magdalen had mastered herself by this time.

"I do not think that you ever heard me say any thing of the kind," she replied. "Indeed I could not, being a sort of trespasser myself, for all these poor people, as you know, are allotted among the regular district visitors."

"Yes," he said, "I am aware that you have no particular respect for regulations, even though they have the sanction of your parochial superiors. I am not one of them, and therefore I have no great right to express any opinion on the subject."

"Exactly so," said Miss Conway, her spirit again rising.

"If I were," said Mr. Grafton, incensed at this answer, "I should not hesitate to prevent a kind of interference which I disapprove."

"Then," said Magdalen, whose sense of humor came to her aid at the sight of his unwarrantable irritation, "I ought to be very grateful to that poor old fence."

Hereupon the Reverend Edward Grafton grew very red indeed, and was in great danger of forgetting that it was scarcely the thing for a gentleman to come into another parish than his own and scold a young lady for doing acts of charity. But the fact was that he cared nothing about parochial limits, or charitable visits, or the poor either, in his present state, and all that his language really meant was, that he was exceedingly angry with Magdalen. He was quite clever enough to feel that he had been talking ridiculously, and that Magdalen would probably give her parents a laughable account of his comminination. So he pulled himself up at the fence.

"Ah!" he said; "you can not suppose I meant to say any thing that could annoy you. We have, you know, battled that little matter over a good many times, and I have not been fortunate enough to convince you that I am right."

"I do not think that I gave much battle," said Magdalen; "indeed, it would have been hopeless, considering that you were supported by all the allied forces of Mrs. Bulliman and the Dorcas Society."

Now if there was one thing in the world which this young clergyman disliked, it was the recognition of women as managers or even advisers in the business of a parish, and therefore this gentle remark went home, especially as it came from Magdalen Conway. He was accused, by the very woman whom he loved, of having brought against her the very women whom, in their parochial capacity, he hated.

"Your memory does me injustice," he said, struggling with his inclination to say something much stronger. "But I have long since ceased to expect any thing like fair play at your hands."

"I do not understand that, Mr. Grafton," said Magdalen, loftily; "but it is not necessary to explain. I will not wait any longer for Mrs. Faunt. Good-morning."

"Stay," he said. "At least we are old friends. You have said that you are not likely to come here again, and I conclude that you have resolved upon this marriage?"

This marriage. Was that the way for Edward Grafton to speak to her? But she was not going to lose her temper.

"I am soon to be married, Mr. Grafton," Magdalen said, "and my poor people will have to do without me for some time, though not for very long. I am sure that you and their other kind friends will attend to them far better than I have done."

She made him a slight bow—she would have given him her hand, in spite of his rudeness, if he had sought to take it—and she was about to go, when he came between her and the little gate of the cottage inclosure.

"There are times," he said, hurriedly, "when a man owes it to himself to speak out in spite of all the conventions of the world, and as you calmly tell me, Magd—Miss Conway, that you are about to take an irrevocable step, and as I may see you no more until it has been taken, I will say something at any risk."

"You know best what risk you are afraid of, Mr. Grafton," said Magdalen, now thoroughly aroused, and haughty.

"I will show you how much afraid I am," he replied, almost insultingly. "I meant only, as you well know, the risk of offending you forever."

He paused, as an angry man will sometimes do, in the vicious hope of being lashed into increased wrath by the reply which he has provoked. But Magdalen disappointed him. She stood still and awaited his next speech.

"You do not answer, but if you did, it would be to say that you do not care enough for my words to be offended by them. So much the better. I can speak with greater freedom. You are about to marry Mr. Ernest Dormer. Now if that person—"

"Or that gentleman." She spoke in the calmest voice.

"Suppose I refuse to accept your correction?"

"Then we have exchanged the last words. Allow me to pass."

"I accept it, then, in the world's sense. Of that gentleman I am not desirous to speak at all."

"That is best, perhaps," said Magdalen, gently.

"Best for him, perhaps," answered Mr. Grafton, unable to govern himself. "But I would speak of *you*," he added, with a hasty gesture of deprecation, as she again sought to pass by. "It is not because I have ventured to admire—to love you, and you refused me, that I now peril all your regard by saying what I would say.

You were perhaps right. I might not have been worthy of you. I know that I adored you—nay, I have done with the past. But I should be false to my own love, false to my own heart, if I did not now warn you to be very sure that you have given your affections to safer keeping than mine would have been. I know how I should have treasured your heart, how I should have hung upon your words, your looks, your smiles, and have felt that all the best service of a whole life would be but a poor repayment for your trust, and I have a right to assure myself—no—but I have a right to ask you to assure yourself that you have secured a truer devotion and a richer love."

"I have heard you. May I not go?"

"With no other answer?"

"My answer is in what I have already said."

"Ah! That you marry Ernest Dormer. That you believe he is worthier of you than I am. You make no other answer? Then, as I solemnly believe that it is not so, and that he is utterly unworthy of you—that your union will be one of misery and—"

He felt, as he spoke, that his speech was shameful, and his forced courage fell at her glance, nor could he again summon resolution to stay her as she passed proudly by him and walked, not hastily, away in the direction of her home.

Grafton sat down on the little bench, clenched his hands, and gazed out upon the landscape, seeing nothing.

He did not know, when he found his tongue, how long he had remained in that attitude.

"I am a fool," he said.

"Yes," said a voice in reply. "Though that's the first wise word the young parson has said."

A woman stood at the cottage door.

Mr. Grafton turned eagerly round.

"You here, Widow Faunt?" he said, savagely.

"I am here, parson. Where should a respectable woman be but in her virtuous home?"

It would not, perhaps, have occurred to any body else to call Mrs. Faunt a respectable woman, though, to outward appearance, she had only just escaped being one. Large, fair, and almost comely, she seemed much superior to the starved and stunted population of Trafalgar, and yet she did not look out of place in that precinct. The plump features were not expressive, but they were not bad, only that Mrs. Faunt, that is her nose, the parting of her hair, and the set of her decent black dress, were all and normally awry. You had an inclination to try to pull her, generally, into straightness. Her dark eyes, though small and deep-set, were bright, nor would the smile have been bad, but that it took various wrong directions, as if the machinery for working it did not obey the owner's will. Could any given principle have been applied to the arrangement of the hair, it would have seemed good, and there was plenty of it, dark, and perhaps a little dusty. The hands, which she had joined across her wealthy bosom, were comfortable-looking hands, and not dirty, nor could Widow Faunt be called a slattern, though there was much about her which the orderly world would condemn. If she looked like one who had seen better days, she also looked like one who was quite or nearly satisfied with the worse ones on which she had fallen.

Mr. Grafton knew her very well. She had occasionally come over to his father's rectory, in the next parish, and assisted in the kitchen, when more than ordinary hospitality was to be dispensed by that proud old clergyman. In rendering help to the rectory cook the Widow Faunt had often given hints of a valuable kind; also of a kind which engendered suspicion. She had suggested divers little refinements, betokening acquaintance with a higher range of art than she could have known except in very good places—nay, she had even ventured to advise her friend to reconsider certain directions, though they had proceeded from her mistress, and the alterations, having been made with tact, and attributed by the cook to her mistake, had been so favorably received that Mrs. Faunt was looked upon with more suspicion than ever. Where had she learned all these things? But the reception which she accorded to any inquiries was so exceedingly discouraging, and, to borrow a classical phrase of the day, so cheeky, that folks grew inclined to use her wisdom without asking whence it came. The young curate, Edward Grafton, had frequently spoken to her at the rectory (the arrangements of a country house preventing the utter strangeness which prevails between masters and servants in London), and his curiosity had been somewhat excited by the reports that were made of her culinary lore. He, however, learned no more about her than that she had a little money, and never went to church, either in his father's parish or her own.

Upon the present occasion her discursive smile irritated Mr. Grafton, and her language was not likely to lessen his irritation.

"You have not been in the house all this time?" he said.

"Sorry to contradict a clergyman, but I have," said the widow.

"Did you hear me calling to you when I came in?"

"Certainly I did, parson. It is a pleasure to hear your voice, it is so loud and distinct like."

"Don't speak to me in that manner, Mrs. Faunt, if you please. Why did you not answer when I called?"

"I suppose one is free to speak or not in one's own house. I have always heard that it was a castle. Perhaps that has been altered; but as I haven't heard of such being the case, you will excuse me."

"You are insolent, Mrs. Faunt."

"Really, parson, you seem inclined to blow up all the ladies this morning. I was going to

ask you indoors, but I'm afraid that you will take to scolding me, and I warn you that I should not be quite so patient under bad language as the other lady who is gone."

"Do you mean that you have been playing the spy—listening to the talk of your betters?"

And Mr. Grafton again became exceeding red, this time with a more creditable feeling than mere shame that he had been overheard in somewhat wild talk. He felt for Magdalen, and raged that her future destinies should have been discussed in the hearing of an inferior. Of course, what he had said would be repeated, and fresh annoyance to Miss Conway would be the result. Place it to the credit of a man in love that he did not think of strangling the witness, but began to consider what money he had about him.

"If my betters choose to come into my garden and talk about their own business I can't help it. I had a right to stand behind my door, and I stood there."

"Very unworthy conduct, Mrs. Faunt," said the young clergyman. "You have been treated with all kindness at the rectory, and I came over to-day to tell you to be there on Wednesday, to do what you are always well paid for. I could not have thought that you would behave in this shameful manner."

"Perhaps you'll be good enough to point out the shamefulness, Sir."

"Treacherous and base in the highest degree, Mrs. Faunt, and I am sorry that you do not perceive it."

"We must agree to differ, Sir," said the widow, with the most appalling effrontery. "But you'll excuse my saying that after the name you was pleased to put to yourself, I may think that I am as likely to be in the right as a gentleman who owns himself to be a fool."

If Edward Grafton had not been a clergyman he would probably have used a bad word at this new provocation. But he was too much in earnest in his fear of Magdalen's being annoyed by this woman's tongue to give much regard to his own humiliation. He said, quietly:

"Well, Mrs. Faunt, a man *is* a fool who talks where he can be overheard. But as I suppose you value the kindness of the rectory, you will see that it will be wise in you to hold your tongue about any thing that you may have heard. And to keep that in your recollection, just—"

"Just please to put up your porte-monnaie, Sir."

Mr. Grafton stared with surprise—first at the French word, pronounced far better than he could have sounded it; and secondly, at finding his intended gift refused. Nor was he pleased, for he had, though young, had some experience of the lower class, and he knew that, when money is refused by them, in nineteen cases out of twenty they mean to be rewarded in some way which will suit you worse. He began to consider whether he could not get the woman summarily removed from Naybury—his father was a magistrate, and had much influence with his brother magistrates—all of which was horribly tyrannical and un-Christianlike, of course. While he pondered Mrs. Faunt spoke again.

"Wouldn't you like to poison me, Sir?" she said, smiling the lax smile.

It was reserved for the assurance of an American gentleman, who used to be known in the theatrical world, to reply at the card-table to a person who said that he thought he had played a queen:

"I'll bet you five pounds, Sir, that you thought nothing of the kind."

We will not presume to say what Mr. Grafton thought. What he answered was:

"Mrs. Faunt, I must beg you not to think evil of those who have behaved well to you. I do not know why you should refuse a little present I was going to offer to you."

"I never cared for little presents, Sir. And when I want a large present, I will take care to have earned it first. You said Wednesday, Sir, I think?"

"Yes, Wednesday. You will come?"

"It will, perhaps, depend on yourself, Sir."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, Sir, I don't say that I might be serving you better than in cooking your father's dinner, but you might think so. Will you please to walk in, Sir? I'll undertake that there are no more listeners."

Edward Grafton entered the cottage, and the widow, dusting the only good chair for him, shut the door and seated herself upon the table. Sat up, well, on that throne, with her feet—smaller than might have been expected, and tidily shod—dangling. A more irreverent attitude for a cottager's reception of a clergyman's visit could not well be devised. Mrs. Bulliman's painful experiences never went so far as this. But it was not for Mr. Grafton just then to assert his dignity.

"Now, Sir, one word for all. I may not be rich and all that, and I live in a cottage that some people wouldn't keep pigs in. But that is neither here nor there. I don't choose to be abused."

"No person should choose it, or do it," said Mr. Grafton, rather cowed.

"No, Sir; but people do many things they oughtn't to. I mean that I expect whatever you may think of what I say, you don't come down on me with any parson-talk, because I won't have it."

And here, on the demand of this woman, did a priest of the Church instantly renounce his right to condemn sentiments which might for aught he knew be utterly atrocious.

"Very good, Sir, a gentleman's promise is enough for me. And now, Sir, will you please to let me remind you, but only in the way of business, of what you said, sitting on my bench outside?"

"Yes, yes," said Edward Grafton. "I know."

"Now don't get angry again, Sir. I have heard a good many persons say the same thing,

never meaning it. But I ought to tell you that in regard to what you had in hand you certainly did go on like—well, we'll say that foolish I couldn't have supposed in a gentleman who has seen the world."

"I know it, I tell you."

"Why, foolish as books are, I mean novels and that, they must have taught you that to abuse a young lady's plighted lover is the way to make her love him better and hate you worse. I am almost ashamed to be swinging my legs on this table" (she ought to have been quite) "and telling such A B C to a gentleman. But it's no disgrace not to understand women. Some men never do to the end of their lives, yet they marry and have large families."

"Mrs. Faunt, I forgot myself. Is there any need to keep on upon the subject?"

"Well, no, but I want to know how much you are in earnest, Mr. Grafton. Because I may be throwing away my words."

"In earnest about what?"

"Wanting to break off the marriage," said Mrs. Faunt, putting her plump elbows on her knees, and looking her spiritual friend straight in the face until he forgot how awry she was in every other particular but her dark black eyes.

"I believe that the marriage is not likely to produce happiness to the lady," said Mr. Grafton, "and therefore I desire to see it prevented."

"Come, young gentleman," said Widow Faunt, "I begin to have hopes of you. That bit of humbug was spoken so well that I think you will get on some of these days."

Edward Grafton, a gentleman by birth and education, writhed under this familiarity, which became worse and worse with every speech. But what was he to do? A man can only exhaust the resources at his disposal. The woman would not take a bribe, and let him go away haughty and comfortable, and there was no choice between allowing her to speak as she chose, and the leaving the scene of the day at the mercy of her merciless tongue. He could but listen.

"I dare say I am very rude, and what you would think quite charming from a middle-aged lady of fashion who condescended to chaff you at dinner is dreadful from a middle-aged low person sitting on a table in a hovel."

"Mrs. Faunt, you seem to me to have mixed in society very much above you."

"Do you call that polite, Sir? How do you know it was above me? How do you know that I have not left it willingly, and am not doing penance for my sins in an old black frock? But never mind that, at least at present. Now, as to this marriage which you want broken off only for the sake of that young lady, who would not show you the book which her lover gave her, and which has the name of her ever affectionate and devoted Ernest in it."

"How do you know?"

"Serve you right to humbug you, I am blessed if it wouldn't. Why, I saw it through the door, of course."

"She never opened the book."

"No. I only wanted to see how close you noticed. But she had the book with her here one day when she came to visit me and relieve my woes—good little soul! She would cry her eyes out, or thereabouts, if I were to tell her something which I could tell her."

"About the man she is engaged to?"

"About Mr. Ernest Dormer. You may not like him, but I am not going to speak rudely of an old friend."

"He is a friend of yours!"

"Awfully rude again. Why not? You said he was not so good as you, that you told the lady, and you are my friend—why not he?"

"Mrs. Faunt, you know something about that man, and his private character."

"And if I do, I hope I am too much of a lady to make an ill use of my knowledge, though a clergyman tells me to do it."

Not only had he to bear this, but in his turn to become the tempter.

"It is something that would prevent the marriage."

"I don't know. Such new-fangled notions have come up about things, and fathers and mothers are so different now from what they used to be. When I was a young lady, and marriageable, I fancy that my parents, if I had ever had any, wouldn't have looked twice at a gentleman who could not give a better account of himself than a friend of ours—or of mine, as you won't own him."

"Mr. and Mrs. Conway have all proper feelings on such subjects."

"Now you don't think so, for you have been talking to them to no purpose."

"And you know that?"

"Yes, and I won't tell you how, at least today. Well, are you game to send me to London?"

"For what?"

"To make some inquiries, without which nothing that could be said could be proved, and you would be called a slanderer, and the young lady would be carried off in glory by Mr. Dormer."

"Go, by all means, Mrs. Faunt. I feel that it is a right thing to ascertain the truth."

"How you gentlemen humbug yourselves and everybody else. But that is no business of mine. Well, I will go to London. Give me ten pounds, in sovereigns, will you?"

"I have not so much with me, but I will get it, and bring it in an hour."

"No, I think you had better not be seen coming again to the Trafalgar. You are not such a regular visitor of the poor that you can be always here without being noticed. Don't be in a rage again: why should you come? It's not your parish, as you truly remarked. How much money have you got?"

Edward Grafton examined his porte-monnaie, and found a five-pound note and a sovereign.

"That would do capital," said Mrs. Faunt, "but for the note. I must change it at the

station, and it would be awkward to have it traced. I'm afraid I shall be driven to do what goes against my nature."

"What?"

"I must come to church. There's an evening service at your father's church to-night. I'll come, and I'll ask to speak to you in the vestry. Have the money ready, and you can make a show, if you like, of relieving me with half a crown, and wishing you saw me oftener at divine service. Then I'll be off by the late train. You shall hear in good time how I get on."

And to this Edward Grafton had come, for the sake of his love and of his vengeance!

His meditations, as he left the widow's door, and turned to the path across the fields between Naybury and Saxbury (the latter his father's parish) were of the most irritating kind, and Edward was not a man possessed of the enviable faculty of examining his troubles one by one, summing up their value, and laying them aside. They constantly recurred to him, sometimes charging him singly, then in a flock, and again by installments, until they had produced a general depression of feeling and a sense of persecution. To-day he had made a whole series of mistakes, which had ended in something like a disaster. He had begun by being rude to Miss Conway, he had actually insulted her by scoffs at her affianced husband, he had revealed to her that she had ample revenge in the existence of his own passion and the rankling torment of his rejection, and he had been left, contemptuously, while raving against her marriage and prophesying her misery. All this was not enough for the "crowded hour" of his misfortunes. Overheard by a low wretch of a woman, of whom he knew nothing but that she was audacious and cunning, he had been compelled to try to retrieve his original folly by an act which he vainly tried to justify as dictated by zeal for Magdalen's welfare. Edward had been educated by a father who had taken special pains to imbue him with a principle of pride, and the younger Grafton could not, with all the pertinacity of self-love and self-defense, argue himself out of the sense that he was acting worse than unworthily. Perhaps, had his tempter and agent been a more refined personage, his feelings would have been less humiliating, though the thing to be done would have lost none of its character. But that woman! The Widow Faunt to be the means of interfering with the destinies of Magdalen Conway! Edward turned savagely round three or four times in the course of his walk, and as often resolved to return and forbid Mrs. Faunt to proceed any further. Once he had a manly purpose. He would not only interdict the widow from action, but he would go up to Mr. Conway's, and have an interview with the parents, tell them of the interview, and express his sorrow that he should have forgotten himself. Then he would explain that his language had been overheard by a person who was capable of trying to cause annoyance, and that he had thought it better at once to make his own confession, that the Conways might be prepared for any unpleasantness. And he would undertake that Magdalen should never hear another word from him that would give her pain. On this course he had nearly made up his mind, when the expression on Magdalen's face as she left him came back in all its scorn, and the good purpose was crushed.

He did turn, however, but it was to go into Naybury to obtain change for his bank-note. He might perhaps have had a difficulty in getting this in the little village, and at all events his asking for it might be remembered in a place whose stagnation made every trifle an event. He obtained the gold at a shop where his mother dealt, a chemist's shop. As he came out he was accosted by a lady of ample proportions and costly garb, who was accompanied by two tall girls almost as richly arrayed.

"Ah, Mr. Edward," said the matron, "I hope that your being at Chervil's does not mean that any body is ill at the rectory."

"Thanks, Mrs. Bulliman, no. We are all well."

He raised his hat, but the ladies had no intention of being so coldly greeted, and each insisted on shaking hands with him. Edward Grafton always disliked the family, but had now very good reasons for hating their very name. Still he could not help shaking hands.

"I hoped that you would have come over last night to the school-house, Mr. Edward," said Mrs. Bulliman.

"I did not know that any thing was going on."

"Why, Phœbe inclosed you a bill at my express desire."

Yes, and he had received it, and thrown it into the fire-place. He had not forgotten this, for his mother had fixed it in his mind by a gentle remonstrance touching the uses of a waste-paper basket, and the ridiculous little incident was full in his recollection as he gazed unlovingly in the face of the gaunt Phœbe.

"It must have miscarried," he said, unblushingly. He did not want to tell a falsehood, but he was in no humor to explain to the Bullimans that he was not interested in the mission to Madagascar, on which a lecture had been overnight delivered.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Edward, for it was a delightful lecture, and one which it was a privilege to have heard. Dear, good Mr. Yotes came home with us to supper, and I should have so liked you to meet him. His narratives of the way in which the poor islanders listened to his discourses were most touching, and brought tears into all our eyes."

"Who is Yotes?" said Edward, not caring in the least for the poor islanders.

"He is a missionary, and resided two years in that lovely but unhappy Madagascar. I am so sorry that you did not come over."

"I could not have come over had I known of it," said Edward Grafton; "we dine at seven."

"Surely, on such an occasion, Mr. Edward,

your father would have advanced his dinner-hour. We all dined at two o'clock, in order to have our tea just before coming, that we might be refreshed and attentive."

"I don't think my father would alter his dinner-hour for all the missionaries and savages in both hemispheres, Mrs. Bulliman," said Edward. "At least, I know that I should not care to be the person to make the proposition to him."

"Phœbe shall transcribe and send you her notes of the lecture, Mr. Edward, for I am sure that you will read them with deep interest. Be sure that you do so, Phœbe."

"And I should like," said her sister, Sophia, "if mamma sees no objection, to send you a beautiful sermon which I heard in London, and which I was so fortunate—so favored, I ought to say—as to be permitted to copy out. It is upon the subject of the Ashantee mission, which is in some respects even more interesting than that to Madagascar."

"We will not say more interesting, Mr. Edward," said Mrs. Bulliman, "but more peculiar, in consequence of the less civilized manners of the heathen in those dark places of the earth. I grieve to say that a suspicion arises that one of the dear missionaries has been eaten."

"I wish they were all eaten, madam," cried Edward, utterly unable to bear the religious small talk any longer; and wishing them a compendious and scarcely courteous good-morning, he hurried away.

"The root of the matter is not in that young man, my dear," said Mrs. Bulliman.

Edward, in quite as heathenish a state of mind as any of the poor islanders who had been privileged to listen to Mr. Yotes, now made his way homeward. He had undergone several of the revulsions of feeling which were common to an excitable but not strong nature, but in the end he was again under the Faunt influence, and he prepared to follow out the widow's plan. He had said truly that the dinner-hour at the rectory was seven, but he had not said that it was postponed until eight upon the occasions when there was an evening service, as on that day. When the Reverend Theodore Grafton, his father, shall be better known, it will be believed that such a service was none of his appointing. It had been instituted by his predecessor, an excellent clergyman of the Evangelical school, who thought that something more than had been the wont at Saxbury might be done for the spiritual good of its clowns. Mr. Grafton had not liked to do away with the arrangement, though he greatly detested it. He had done his best to get rid of the inconvenience, by causing it to be distinctly understood by any one who officiated that the sermon must be at an end by a quarter to eight, for the rectory dinner was never to be kept waiting.

The service was performed by Edward Grafton, and was not graced by the presence of his sire, who preferred sitting in his excellent library, and reading out of his fine, gentlemanly quarto volumes of the last century, to hearing religion expounded unto him by his own child. Nor did Mrs. Grafton attend this evening, though she loved to hear her boy deliver the Liturgy, and to recollect how she taught him words of one syllable. This evening, however, the rector had commanded her to write letters for him, and to hear was to obey, in her case, with certain exceptions. Edward Grafton sometimes exercised himself by putting his best mind into his sermons, to the utter discomfiture of the mind of Saxbury. But to-night he was in no spirit to take more trouble with his work than was absolutely necessary, and the service was gone through in a perfunctory manner. He snatched from his sermon-box at home the first discourse which came to hand, and did not look at it until he spread it before him in the pulpit. It happened to be upon Men of Belial, on whom the writer was very severe for their treachery and false witness, but whom the preacher let off rather easily, reading in the most unimpassioned style the hard names by which he had called them. Perhaps he did not know what he was about—once or twice he was startled at the sound of his own voice, and found that he was bawling, he knew not why. Having given the benediction, he went into the vestry, and gave the Woman of Belial ten pounds, adding, privately, what was less like a benediction than should have been the wish of a pastor dismissing a member of his flock to travel by land or by water.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRITISH DRAMA.

"Mr. Fletcher in?"

"In, of course he is," shouted a voice.

The question had been put by Mr. Francis Beaumont, dramatist, to the smiling little servant who opened the street-door of a very tiny detached cottage in the old Brompton road. The answer proceeded from Mr. John Fletcher, dramatist, who was at the moment within two feet of his friend, but divided from him by the partition which formed the side of the exceedingly narrow passage.

"Enter, Francis," continued the voice of the unseen, a loud and cheery voice. "Don't lose yourself in those vast halls and labyrinths."

Two steps brought Mr. Beaumont into the parlor, and about four would have taken him across that miniature chamber. But he knew its smallness, and checked his manly stride as he entered.

"Yes, you may well look at the clock, old man," said Mr. Fletcher, from a sofa on which he was lying. "You were to be here at twelve, don't you know?"

"I were," responded his friend, quietly. He vouchsafed no further explanation until he had deposited his hat on the top of a book-case, seated himself in an American rocking-chair, and lighted a pipe.

"*Ex fumo da lucem*," said the host.

"That sounds well for business—we have been at our Latin," replied Mr. Beaumont. "Well, I have seen Mallow."

"Yes, and we are to get to work?"

"Instantly, if not sooner. He likes the notion, and the burlesque is to be put into rehearsal the moment we are ready with it."

"Terms?"

"What we said. Not a word of objection."

"All right. And did you tell him any thing about it?"

"Only the subject, and that we should avail ourselves of the entire debility of his company, besides that he must engage Gracie Clare, which he at once promised to do."

"He is a brick. Better send her a line, and tell her immediately to begin to find her present manager disagreeable."

"I saw her yesterday at Windsor, and asked her to look in here this afternoon, on the chance of our having something to say. Whereat her ladyship wunk a wink."

"Then, Francisco, the sooner we get to work the better, eh?"

"Much. What an infernal litter you keep this place in! I could not write in such a mess."

"You should invigorate your will, and teach it to dominate over accidents," said Mr. Fletcher. "But I admit that the room is not in what can with precision be called order."

He certainly spoke the truth, and the small room was in rather a chaotic state. Mr. Fletcher was a journalist, as well as a dramatist, and therefore read all his contemporaries, whose broad sheets lay in little hills in the corners and under the table. On the latter there was no clear space save the oasis presented by a blotting-book, the rest of the area being occupied by yellow French plays, English play-bills, a cigar-box, the *Charivari*, and printers' long proofs, which curled up like snakes, and which, had they been snakes, might have hissed the reluctance with which the author, like most of his brethren, set himself to the duty of correction. A Delphine Virgil also lay there, opened at the end of Book I., and near it a classical dictionary, signs well understood by Mr. Beaumont, and approved by that gentleman. Rescuing the volumes from the danger which menaced the rest of the contents of the table, Mr. Fletcher, with a Napoleonic sweep of the arm, suddenly sent nearly every thing else to the floor. Nor let the smiling little servant be reproached that a cloud of dust arose. She was willingness and cleanliness embodied, but the solemn maledictions which Mr. Fletcher had two or three times pronounced, purposely within her hearing, against any body who should unbidden "disturb" his papers, had been more effective than Shakspeare's curse upon those who should move his bones.

"Pardon my insinuating that you are a pig, John," said his friend, as he watched the dust flying out at the open window and into the sunshine.

"The discovery is not novel," said Mr. Fletcher, coolly. "Many persons have made the same representation to me. You married parties get finikin notions into your heads, and fidget awfully. Will you have any refreshment—there's some Bordeaux at your right hand, or do you desire plebeian beer?"

"Neither, just now, thanks."

Mr. Fletcher then opened a drawer, produced some quarto paper, set some sheets and a clean pen before his friend and himself, and making a just division of ink-glasses, which he filled from a great stone bottle on the mantle-piece (spilling large drops upon the fender), looked Mr. Beaumont straight in the face, and observed:

"*Dido*—Gracie."

"Of course," said Beaumont; "but don't be in such a hurry."

Mr. Fletcher was a man of about thirty, rather good-looking, with a bright expression of face, and a ready laugh. He had a very handsome mustache and a graceful beard, but not much hair. He was slight, and not tall. It need hardly be said that he was in what is courteously called a careless dress. Its chief feature was a nondescript article, whose maker might have had some glimmerings of the nature of a coat, but who had contrived something between a pea-jacket and a morning-gown. It had once been of a lilac color, but you might now decline to state its hue, and yet not be accused of color-blindness. There was no doubt, however, of the exceeding yellowness of a broad strap with which it had pleased Mr. Fletcher to gird his waist, and which he tightened occasionally when designing to show that he was much in earnest. But Mr. John Fletcher, when he came out of his cell into the world, was always correctly and even elegantly dressed, had his gloves on, and wore a flower.

Mr. Beaumont was a tall, powerfully-made man, not in the least resembling the ideal of a poet or a student, but looking much like a man of business. A first sight of him would not probably induce you to take a second, but when he spoke, the singularly pleasant and musical voice made you feel that the speaker was somebody whom you ought to like, and then you looked again, and observed that he had fine dark eyes, and that the smile was also fine—he did not laugh much. The sketch is complete when it has been said that he was well-dressed. This had always been the case with him, and Mr. Fletcher's gibe at the refining influence of marriage was misplaced as regarded Mr. Beaumont, who had always been orderly, and outwardly respectable.

"Don't be in such a hurry," repeated John Fletcher. "But it behooves us to be in a hurry, doesn't it? The piece must be done as fast as we can do it."

"Just so; but don't begin to cast it until we have quite settled the story."

"Why, you have told Mallow what it is, unless you have been changing it on your own

responsibility. Didn't we settle that it should be *Dido and Æneas?*"

"Of course, and Gracie Clare is to be *Dido*. But now for a little consideration. How is the story to be treated? I see you have been at Virgil, and one knows all that he has to say. But Virgil isn't every body. And, first, let us see what Dr. William Smith has to say."

"I have read all that, my dear fellow; but here, look for yourself."

Beaumont carefully studied the learned page. Then he took his pen.

"Let us, in the first place, have every body who is mentioned, and bother all attempt at accuracy," said the unscrupulous Mr. Fletcher.

"Certainly," returned his fellow-conspirator. "If the people did not all live at the same time, they ought to have done so, and who was Virgil, a benighted heathen, that he should have anachronistic privileges which are denied to two eminent Christian writers? Now write down, will you?"

"*Ignis via.*"

"*Dido*, we've said. *Æneas*, of course."

"Who should play The Pious?"

"Let us get the characters out first, can't you?" said Mr. Beaumont. "There's *Pygmalion.*"

"Good name for a bill. He was a sculptor, wasn't he?—and the statue came to life. Parody the scene at the end of the 'Winter's Tale,' with tragic imitations—deuced good."

"This was another Pygmalion altogether. But your ignorance is felicitous—we'll combine the characters. This one was Dido's brother and enemy, and killed her uncle, who had married her."

"That wasn't very inimical. I call it rather a brotherly attention. Shall we have in the killing of the uncle, with a bit from the end of *Hamlet?* It will give a more elevated tone to the piece, and appeal to the legitimate beggars."

"We'll think. What shall we call him, *Sichæus* or *Acerbas?* either is correct."

"Oh, *Acerbas*, certainly. It sounds better; besides, there's a line ready made—

'Acerbas speaks with far too much acerbity.'"

"Yes, or the same another way, as the cookery-books say—

'The ex-Acerbas shows exacerbation.'"

"Then," said Fletcher, "there's *Ascanius*—a pretty little part for pretty little Maria Clive."

"And the sister, *Eliza*, that goes about crying, 'Why did you die?'—we might give her an Irish brogue, and make her wake Dido—make a note of that, I see some fun. *Hiarbas*, who was a king near Carthage, and wanted to marry *Dido*—we want him, of course."

"Carthage! By Jove, splendid! Hooray!" cried Mr. Fletcher, tightening his strap mercilessly. "Have you read *Salammbo?* We'll have her in, most decidedly. The costume alone, and the chain on her legs, will draw every body. Who's a large, handsome creature, in Mallow's company? She need not talk much, but she should be able to dance, and we might have a dance between her and the Holy Snake. I suppose that's about as much of the snake business as the licenser would stand," said the dramatist, sadly, and just then wishing that he lived in France.

"Yes, we'll have *Salammbo*," said Beaumont, slowly. "But it will be only for the stalls, I'm afraid. The great B. P. doesn't read that sort of thing."

"But the great British Public will come and see what the stalls say is good. We'll talk of this—it is the gem of the piece. If Mrs. Argyll would do it," Fletcher added, wistfully.

"Out of the question. *She'd* do it in a minute, and be only too delighted. But."

"Yes, confound him, I suppose so. If he'd only break his neck in hunting," said Fletcher, thoughtfully. "However, we can't have every thing. Whom else have you got? The brave *Gyas* and the brave *Cloanthus*, friends of *Æneas*—they must be exactly alike, and say the same thing; we owe that deference to Virgil."

"We must have some more women; but first let us settle another point. Gods and goddesses, eh?"

"They've been worked to death."

"Yes, but they're always acceptable. You see the mass of people have learned the distinctive characters of the deities, and that is something. And the dresses are so lovely."

"Unless we know any other mythology that could be got in. The Scandinavians have been tried, but the B. P. hates new ideas, and Thor and Woden and Frigga don't please like Jupiter and Mars and Venus. The Oriental gods are such duffers—Juggernaut, though, with a car up to the roof, and studded with nautch girls holding colored lights, would tell. No, it won't do. We want Juno and Iris, you see, specially for the story."

"Yes, that's true," said Beaumont. "I told Mallow that we must have a magnificent finish. *Dido* prepares to burn herself on the funeral pile."

"End of *Sardanapalus!*" interjected his friend. "Do you remember Mrs. Kean's magnificent entrance?

'I've lit the lamp that lights us to the stars.'"

"Who doesn't? But the line's foolish. The idea of taking a lamp to find out a star."

"You have no poetry, Beaumont. Nobody has any poetry in him who keeps his papers in order."

"Never mind about that. I was saying that the pile is prepared, and *Dido* gets upon it. Well, she must not kill herself, you see."

"Then what's the good of *Iris*, who comes down to help her out of life? I can't agree to give up that—the descent on the rainbow, and the drawing a thousand colors from the light, were expressly invented by Virgil with a prophetic view to our burlesque."

"Who wants to give it up? But we can't have any thing melancholy at the end of the piece, can we?"

"No, the B. P. likes to howl only over sen-

timental coster-mongers and self-sacrificing scavengers. You must save *Dido!*"

"Of course. *Iris* will come down and sing a nigger melody, and so the rainbow scene will be shown, and then the goddess will take out a box of matches—warranted to light only on the lid—and fire the pile. Awful conflagration for a minute; we'll have that capitally done—and then the pile sinks, and discloses *Æneas*, returned, and kneeling at *Dido's* feet."

"That will do, I think, if they manage it properly."

"I assure you, Mallow saw the notion, and means to carry it out splendidly. I have not often seen him jump at a thing as he did. I think he must have heard that somebody else is at the same subject."

"Probably, and that accounts for his being eager to get on. However, that's his business. Ours is to go ahead. Let us knock out a programme of the scenes," said Mr. Fletcher. "How do we begin?"

"Sea-shore, I suppose. *Dido* and all her ladies amusing themselves; some going into bathing-machines, and afterward seen dancing in the water. *Dido* orders her Poet-Laureate to sing a song, and we must have a ballet. Suddenly awful screams from the water, and all the bathing girls rush frantically forward—the Biarritz dresses a little improved will tell capitally—and an awful sort of sea-monster is announced as coming, and this, of course, is *Æneas*, who comes on shore with swimming belts all over him, and spluttering terribly, and abusing the ocean in the worst language, until he suddenly recollects that he is The Pious, and begins to sing a hymn. Then he sees *Dido*. Venus at the moment appearing, and making him an elegant party, he introduces himself, as in Virgil."

"You had better write that scene, as you have thought it over, hadn't you? But I don't like *Dido's* being on—she ought to have an entrance."

"Yes, that's true. Well, let's see. Oh, that's easy enough—she shall come on while they are at their games, and blow them up for playing on Sunday. That's good, and we'll get in some hits at Sabbatarianism—please the gallery—bit of clap-trap. What, the only day the poor man has a chance to view the green face of Nature—and all that. *Probatum est.*"

"Shall I see Vetch about the music?"

"Yes, by all means. But we'll ask Gracie Clare whether she has got any thing striking for her opening air. Talking of the angel, here she comes," said Beaumont, looking out at the window. "Now, that's truly dramatic, isn't it?"

"Theatrical, but not dramatic, Mr. Beaumont. Go and let her in."

In a minute more Gracie Clare, the young actress touching whose performance in the *Demon and the Dumpling* honorable mention was made at the banquet given at the Octagon, entered the little room, and brightened it, as a girl's presence only can brighten a prosaic apartment. Not regularly pretty, but with features to which stage appliances lent a ravishing beauty, at least in the eyes of those who knew nothing of such appliances, Gracie had a saucy smile, which did execution upon the wisest and most hardened of her admirers. She was not very clever, but the smile was very clever indeed, and men who had just heard her utter either nonsense or commonplace, would, in defiance of themselves, affix wit or finesse to her chatter, merely from the force of that remarkably knowing movement of lips. Miss Clare had bright eyes, a complexion which had not been much injured by stage work, and which was brown and healthy, and the graces of her rounded figure were recognized by all western London. Finally, her real name was not Gracie Clare but Jane Nobb, and deducting an odd story, which those who liked her declared to be without foundation, and to have originated in her extreme kindness to an orphan, she was a reasonably good, as well as a very good-natured girl. Moreover, she knew how to dress herself off the stage, as well as to undress herself for going on to it, and as her mother, Mrs. Nobb, a respectable green-groceress in a small way, observed, it was no matter, however promiscuous you might meet her, she were always looking like a lady. Which is more than can be said of every body who actually is a lady, as may be seen by men who venture into the suburbs before lunch-time.

"Well, you two conspirators," said Miss Clare, "what deeds of dreadful note are you at now?"

"Take the rocking-chair, Gracie," said Mr. Fletcher.

"Sha'n't," said the young lady. "It endangers my showing my ankles, about which I am very particular. Besides, I dare say it is awfully dusty. You want me here for a day, John Fletcher, to set you to-rights."

"And to stay every day, and keep me so," returned the gallant Fletcher.

"With a timmy ummy tiddy uddy ido," sang out Miss Clare, in light scorn of a compliment. However, she sat down in the rocking-chair, and surveyed her friends.

"Gracie," said Francis Beaumont, "Mallow wants you, and he'll give you—"

"Yesterday's fish," remarked Miss Clare, elegantly. "Mallow has got me."

"That's looking alive, though," said Fletcher. "Why, it is not a couple of hours since you saw him, Beaumont."

"When did *you* see him, Gracie?"

"Not at all. But his Fat Totum called on me yesterday, and proposed terms which I was graciously pleased to accept. I see all about it. You are doing a piece, and you have got the artful Mallow to promise to engage me for it, and lo, and behold, he had already engaged me. I suppose I ought to have kept that cat in the bag, but I never could be cruel to a dumb animal."

"What an old dodger it is!" said Beaumont. "Why couldn't he tell me that?"

"It is not his nature to," said Fletcher, "any more than it's the nature of the animal Grace mentions to walk straight to you."

"Mystification pure and simple, and for its own sake; for what on earth was he to get by it?"

"Nature, my friend, has once been defined, and the definition will last as long as nature herself."

"'Nature's a rum un, said Mr. Squeers.' Is that what you mean?"

"That, and all philosophy can get no farther. Adding that Mallow is also a rum un, let us dismiss that part of the subject and come to Gracie."

"I don't want you to come to me. Sit where you are, and tell us what you are doing for me."

"A stunning burlesque part," said Mr. Beaumont, "and that is all that it is good for you to know at present."

"I understand. You're afraid that I shall let out your precious subject. But I can keep a secret, my dear young men."

"So they say," said John Fletcher, nodding.

"Don't shake your gory locks at me, Sir, but tell me what you mean by that."

"I mean that you are every thing that is prudent and discreet," said Mr. Fletcher. "Do you think that I should be so madly attached to you as I am if you were otherwise?"

"We shall have a word of a sort, John Fletcher," said Miss Clare, a little angrily, "one of these days, if you hint at things which you don't choose to explain. It is so noble, isn't it?"

"I like to see you in earnest, Gracie."

"Do you? I advise you not to put me too much in earnest," replied the girl. "But I always thought I was a fool," she added, the smile returning, "and now I know it. You ought not to have had a rise out of me."

"If I didn't like you so much I wouldn't tease you, Gracie."

"Thank you for considerably less than nothing, John," was the pert rejoinder. "Well, but I say, gentlemen authors. I am to open with Mallow in this piece of yours. Give me some notion of the sort of thing. Am I a man or a woman?"

"Woman."

"Bother! I say, make it a man."

"Can't be," said Beaumont. "Such a fine part—all the talking and all the acting. And there's nobody in the theatre can touch it or come near it but you."

"Mallow promised that I should play Apollo or some other man."

"You said you had not seen Mallow. Don't tell stories, Gracie."

"The Fat Totum promised it—come now."

"He wouldn't dare. Don't tell stories, Gracie."

"I am sure you might manage it, if you chose," said Miss Clare, plaintively. "If it was only John Fletcher I would have it done, too, see if I wouldn't; but you, Frank Beaumont, you are as obstinate as two hundred and fifty mules and a donkey."

"When you hear the part, and read what the press will say of you the morning after, you will go down on your knees and beg my pardon for ever having asked me to take such a character from you. It gives name to the piece, and as I tell you, all the work is in it. And you want that transferred to Mrs. Argyll!"

"Yes, she'd be a nice person to give it to, certainly. You'd have to stick a dentist at the wing to keep putting aitches into her mouth. Well, I suppose I can't help myself. What sort of dresses are they?"

"Classical," said Fletcher.

"Well, then, I won't play the part, there. A woman's classical dress is just about as ineffective as possible. Oh, it's classical piece, is it? Well, then, give me one of the male characters. I don't care how slight—with a song or two—and I'll undertake to make something of it. Come, be good children."

"Don't be a goose, Gracie," said Beaumont, who began to feel as a man of business does when business is interrupted by caprice. "You'll play this part, or none at all. I think you may trust Fletcher and myself to look after your interests."

"Very well, give it to Mrs. Argyll," said Miss Clare, the tears coming into her pretty eyes.

"I don't know," said the relentless Beaumont, "that she could not do a good deal with it, especially if we treated it in the way, Fletcher, of which we were speaking. Her figure would tell. And Gracie Clare shall play in the next piece we do, by which time she will have repented of mistrusting old friends."

Mr. Francis Beaumont was a married man, and if Mrs. Francis Beaumont had happened to look in at the open window at that moment she might have been at least as much surprised as delighted to see a pretty girl jump out of her chair, throw her arms round Mr. Beaumont's neck, and give him a tearful kiss.

"You cross old patch, I'll play what you like to give me, but don't scold me like that."

"All for your good, my dear Gracie," said Mr. Beaumont, calmly. He did not return the salute, but he gave the crying girl a kindly sort of hug, and replaced her in her seat.

"Let all differences be drowned in the flowing bowl," said John Fletcher, tendering Gracie a tumbler of Bordeaux, which she took, and, with a nod to each, signifying that pacific relations were restored, finished.

"Not bad tipple," was the young lady's criticism. "And now, if I thought that I should not leave you in misery for having vexed me, I would go away, but as I said just now, I never could be cruel to dumb animals."

"But I want to say a word to you, Gracie," said Beaumont. "If you have any fancy for any particular air to sing in the piece speak now or forever hereafter hold your peace."

"Having taken my physic like a good child,

now I am to have my sugar-plums. I am sure it's very considerate of you! I will think. Here's another man coming. Is it a dramatic author? No, I think it's a gentleman," she said, with a capital assumption of the manner of a servant-girl who sees a visitor for her master. "I know who it is. It's Ernest Dormer. And I know where *he* has been."

"You don't," said Beaumont; "but if you think you do I recommend you to say nothing about it before him."

"Oh, I dare say, Mr. Hypocrisy. I am told that you are fond of private theatricals, and are not altogether bad, though you are much too long for the stage, and rather a stick. Did you ever play Dr. Cantwell? I shall just say what I like."

"Beaumont is right, Gracie," said Fletcher, again tightening his strap, and winking.

"Don't wink at me," said Miss Clare, "because it's vulgar; and if there's one thing I hate and detest more than another it's vulgarity."

Whereat Ernest Dormer came in, and was cordially welcomed by Fletcher, and perhaps a little less cordially by Beaumont.

"Well, Miss Gracie," said Ernest, gayly, and with a nod which showed that, like Marmion and Lady Heron, they were friends of old, "are they taking your measure?"

"Pretending," said Gracie; "but they are shocking bad tailors. I am glad that you have come to help them."

"I should not presume to try," said Dormer. "I congratulate you, miss, on being in such good hands. Now we shall see you in something worthy of your—" he pretended to hesitate, and added, laughingly—"figure."

"Just what you won't," replied the actress, seriously.

"I thought we had settled that matter," said Beaumont.

"Have every confidence in them, Gracie," said Ernest. "Not that I need advise you to have confidence."

"Come, don't you be rude," said Miss Clare. "I always tell every body that you are a model and a true woman's friend."

"Ah, but where to find the true woman, Miss Gracie?" said Ernest, lightly.

"You have no right to say that," replied Gracie, with point; and Beaumont looked up at her from the book he was again examining.

Ernest Dormer perhaps did not care to answer the remark.

"I have been calling on Walter Latrobe," he said to the men, "and I found he had got a child's party all to himself. The prettiest sight you ever saw—about a dozen or fifteen little things all screaming with ecstasy, while Walter, in an Indian dress, was doing juggler's tricks for them. I wanted to talk to him particularly, but I had not the heart to disturb their fun. So I have looked in to disturb yours."

"I dare say that there were other places about here where you might have been welcome," said Grace Clare, "and where you might have seen pretty children."

"No doubt," said Ernest, quietly. "But I should have seen nothing so pretty as Miss Gracie Clare."

"And that's a story, too," said the irrepressible Grace. "Mr. Fletcher, I think that I have already desired you to abstain from winking at me."

Which observation, it will be perceived, was not mere fun, but was designed to tell Ernest Dormer that his friend had signaled.

"Nothing can be ruder," said Mr. Dormer, "except John's not asking me to have some wine. Not that I want any, though, for I was wise enough to take a glass of something excessively nice and cool and unwholesome, which Latrobe had brewed for his children."

Grace Clare looked as if she was going to say something else which the authors did not wish her to say, so Beaumont cut in.

"I dined at the Octagon on Tuesday, Dormer. Very good dinner indeed. Milwarden asked me, and I heard something of a remarkable banquet at which you had been a distinguished guest."

"Yes, it was a thing to remember," said Dormer, with a look that showed he understood why Grace had been winked at. "Who dined with Milwarden besides yourself?"

Before Beaumont could reply Miss Clare rose.

"Oh, if you are going into your club talk it is time that a lady should retire," she said. "Now mind, you two, I'm not above half friends with you, and it will only be a kind thing to a poor, struggling, unprotected—"

"Eh?" said Ernest, laughing.

Grace's sudden look was by no means so amiable as the mock piteousness which she had assumed. But she finished her appeal.

"I say it will be only a kind thing if you send me a note to-night, to tell me that you two have thought better of it, and done what I asked you. I don't expect it; for of all the obstinate pigs in Europe an author is the worst, and when there are two they back up one another. However, them's my sentiments, and adieu, with tears. How's Lucy, Ernest Dormer?"

"Perfectly well, I trust," said Mr. Dormer, without the slightest manifestation of surprise. He had been prepared for the parting shot.

"My best love to her."

"When I have an opportunity I will make a point of delivering your kind message," said Ernest, with the tone he would have used in a drawing-room. The manner and his steady look at Grace were too strong for her, and without another word she whisked herself off the premises.

The authors, as Dormer turned from the door, which he had politely opened, and resumed his seat, were both looking at their paper, and on the lips of each there was a sort of half-vexed, half-amused expression.

"I fear you are not in her good books, for all her praises, Ernest," said Fletcher.

"I ought to be," said Dormer, "for I got Mangles to give her no end of a puff, totally undeserved. Such is life, to hazard a novel meditation. But I see that you want to get to work, and I won't hinder you. Just let her ladyship walk out of sight, as I am not exactly anxious to take up the conversation where it left off."

"You don't hinder us," said Beaumont, without reference to the last words. "We have knocked out a sort of programme of a burlesque, and I don't think we can do much more with it to-day. Can you give us any ideas?"

"I should think not. To tell you the truth, I am rather out of sorts, or out of temper, or what you like, to-day, and I should only be a dull colleague. I specially wanted to see Latrobe, and had primed myself with something I wished to say to him, and I find him beleagued by babies. He would have come away from them, of course, but you know what a man is when he is consulted at a time when his mind is somewhere else. What's your subject?"

"Dido and Æneas—keep it dark, of course," said Beaumont.

"That goes without to say, as the French have it," replied Dormer, with an attempt to be cheerful. "A capital one. Nothing is likely to occur to me that you won't think of, but I'll turn it over. Shall you bring in Creusa?"

"We had not thought of her—would she be useful?" said Fletcher, doubtingly.

"Well, I don't know that she would," said Dormer. "He deserted her cruelly enough, and that's not an agreeable subject. I think you are right. Good-by, both, and good luck."

"Thanks," said both, as the door closed behind him.

"I know—at least I guess—what he wants with Walter Latrobe," said Fletcher.

"I fancy I do," said his friend. "And it is like Ernest Dormer to select the kindest fellow out for the business."

"Not so kind to Walter, though," said Fletcher.

"Well, no. I had to do it once, and I'll quarrel with the best friend I have in the world—you, John, for instance—sooner than undertake it again."

"I sha'n't trouble you in that line," said Fletcher, laughing, and once more tightening his strap. "But there's trouble and weeping coming for somebody," he added, gravely. "And now, where can we get in a dance for *Dido*?—that monkey is so proud of her hornpipes."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE GARDEN.

"She is a long time to-day," said Mr. Conway to his wife. "I hope that she has met with nothing unpleasant."

"My dear William, what can she have met? It is like your dear old fidgeting ways when we lived in London, and when you made yourself uncomfortable if I staid out an hour later than I had intended. Do you recollect sending the clerks to look after me one evening when I had gone to Islington?"

"Yes, and how you scolded me for it."

"Not much scolding, though it would have served you right. But don't keep looking at your watch. Do you not know that a woman never comes while she is being waited for?"

"No. But I remember one woman who never kept me waiting; and indeed was generally impatient enough to be before her time."

"If you refer to Mary Herbert, Sir, you tell a story."

"Mary, another thing occurs to me, and I mention every thing to you, just as it springs to my mind. This may be nonsense."

"I will bet that it is, William," said Mrs. Conway, laughing.

"No matter. Did you see Magdalen after she had read her letter to-day?"

"No, I went into the green-house, and she was gone when I came out."

"Well, I did. I watched her from my dressing-room window."

"What made you do that?"

"Why, it is so delightful to see the girl thoroughly happy that I could not help having a look at her as she sat in the shade, studying the letter. I wish I had not looked."

"Why, my dear soul?" said Mrs. Conway, anxiously.

"Because the letter brought her no happiness; I am certain of that."

"How can you say so! You mean that she did not laugh heartily, or kiss the letter, or make any demonstrations that you could see. Don't you know that there is such a thing as quiet happiness, which is the best sort of all, and which we enjoy in silence? No, I don't think you ever understood that, William. You are too restless to have known it."

"There is some truth in what you say, dear. But I have had plenty of happiness, thanks to you, in my own way."

"And I hope you will have much more."

"Much I don't know about. I am getting old."

"I will throw something at you if you talk in that way. If you are old, what am I? Hold your tongue if you can not be more polite to your wife."

"But about Magdalen, dear. I will tell you more. I *am* growing old, for I can not see so well at a distance as I could, and I was so annoyed at what I thought I saw in her face that I determined to be sure that I had not been mistaken. I contrived to meet her as she came through the hall."

"Well?"

"Well, how does she usually meet me? Either she laughs, and pretends to strike me as she goes past, or she stops and kisses me, or she flourishes her letter at me, or does some playful bit of nonsense that shows she is happy.

To-day she only looked at me, did not speak, and went up to her room."

"Mighty thing to fidget about, truly. You are more like a jealous lover than a fond father. She had already kissed you three times—once when she came down to breakfast, and twice at the window for teasing her. As to her being preoccupied, perhaps Ernest had sent her some wonderful anagram, like those he made the other night, and she was puzzling at the solution. My dear William, do get your straw-hat and go round the garden, and shake yourself out of your fidgets before Maggie comes back."

"Come with me, then."

"Oh, very well; any thing to cure you."

They went out, beyond the lawn, and through an arch cut in a thick holly-hedge, into a large garden, chiefly laid out for kitchen uses, but in the centre of which there was a grass-plot, with a small summer-house.

The change, however, did not work upon Mr. Conway as his wife had intended.

"I wish that Magdalen would show you that letter," he said, digging viciously, with a cane, at an unobtrusive weed, which, as many unobtrusive people do, offered unexpected resistance to ill-treatment.

"I can hardly ask that, dear. But she often shows me passages of his letters, and makes only a funny pretense of being mysterious about the rest. At all events, let us see how she looks when she comes in."

"That will be no evidence, because an occupation like that on which she is gone will have removed the first impressions of the day."

"I never knew any one so determined to find grievances, and if he can not find them, to make them. If she comes in laughing, you will say that it is kindly and filial hypocrisy, to prevent our suspecting any thing, I suppose."

"I can not help my nature, my dear. It has lasted me a good many years, and will last me to the end, I dare say."

"Yes, yes, we know all that," said Mrs. Conway, laughing; "and how your wife cured you of a great deal of such nonsense. But this incessant self-worry is another matter."

"I do not remember enduring it much except in regard to Maggie," said Mr. Conway. "Perhaps it is a presentiment."

"That is downright heathenish talk, William," said Mrs. Conway, more emphatically than the calm-natured woman was accustomed to speak. "Presentiment, indeed! what does that mean? A supernatural warning, and yet a warning so stupidly given that we can not tell what it means. I am really ashamed of you, with your splendid education and talents, to talk like an old woman who is sure that the house is going to catch fire because a toad came out of the coal-hole."

"I only threw out the idea, my love."

"Throw it out of your mind altogether, then, as I throw this snail out of the garden," said Mrs. Conway, suiting the action to the word.

"Our neighbor, Jameson, is not a Dissenter, my dear Mary."

"Who said he was? What do you mean?"

"I thought you and Maggie were reading Dr. Johnson's life, that's all. You have not come to the passage. When you do you will understand."

"No, he is not a Dissenter," said Mrs. Conway (who, like a great many very dear women, was quite content to await an explanation of a story until it came to her, or to go without it altogether), "but he is not much of a churchman. He sits under his cedar-tree on Sunday morning, and reads newspapers and smokes a cigar."

"In that case you were quite right to throw him the snail, a heathen. But has not his abstinence from church something to do with the excessive badness of the sermons?"

"Who is he, to set himself up as a judge? Why, he has not lived in the parish above six months!"

Mr. Conway laughed.

"How long, then, does it require to give a man a right to vote that his parson is a bore? I thought I gained that franchise very soon after coming here."

"Yes, but you go to church."

"Well, you take me there. I suspect that would be the answer of a very large number of obedient husbands, my dear, who pass for very religious men. But I own I am often tempted to say that we will go and hear Mr. Grafton instead of our good old mumble-plum."

"That I am sure we never will. I consider that Edward Grafton has behaved exceedingly ill."

"We talked that over, and I think each of us retains the opinion each began with. But I did not mean to go and hear a boy like Edward. I should like an occasional sermon from the old rector."

"I should not. In the first place, I should not choose to encourage him," said this irreverent lady (whose notions of the divine right of the priesthood were vague), "after Edward's conduct; and in the second place, I don't believe that he is sincere."

"Encouraging a rich old rector, of an ancient family, by hearing him preach, my dear Mary, is a very womanly way of looking at your spiritual relations with your clergy. But I admit that the insincerity, if it exists, would be a strong objection to my going to his church. I can not tell, however, why you make that charge. He is very much respected."

"I don't know. He has a tall, commanding figure, white hair, and a sonorous voice, and is so full of pride that he can hardly hold together. I wonder whether the twelve apostles had their family pedigrees stuck up in their halls, with a great tree growing out of the stomach of a man in armor?"

"It may be doubted, my dear Mary; but times have changed, and you must pardon my saying that the illustration is rather of the sort dear to a very low type of church-reformer, one

who usually criticises the mitre while holding the pewter."

"I dare say, but I have no patience with such pride. Besides, there are some very odd stories whispered about that rectory."

"Where are they not whispered? We seem to have changed characters, my dear, and it is you who deal in unpleasantnesses. Perhaps odd stories are whispered about ourselves, perhaps about Magdalen."

"William!"

"Well, I merely put a supposititious case. Certainly we got this property fairly enough, and even poor old Captain Brocklyn never denied that in his wildest days of boiled rum; and the reports of the trial are before the world. But who knows whether we forged no deeds, no tombstones, no other evidence that helped us into possession?"

"What things you imagine!"

"Such things have been. What do they say about the rectory?"

"I thought that men never cared to hear scandal?"

"We ought not to wish to hear it—and yet I don't know. All facts have their place in history—any how, tell me what they say about the Graftons."

"Well, it is not very clear. He, you know, is more proud than—"

"Than all the twelve apostles. We agreed to that."

"I was going to mention something quite different, but it is better not. You know what I mean."

"The Devil, in point of fact."

"Well, never mind. Old Mr. Grafton is awfully proud."

"Yet he did not disdain the alliance of the Conways."

"Disdain, indeed!" said Mrs. Conway. "Your daughter is a match for any nobleman, and though my father was a bookbinder he was a gentleman, which is more than Mr. Grafton is, if all stories be true. I think that the condescension would have been on our side."

And it was rather pleasant to see the kindly matron bristle up for a moment in honor of her husband and her child, exactly on the spot where she had pronounced her little homily against pride.

"Well, my dear Mary, though we have been spared the necessity of exercising the condescension you speak of so humbly, I should like to know the dangers that we have escaped. I hope Mr. Grafton does not hold incorrect views upon sublapsarianism."

"I don't suppose he knows what it means any more than I do."

"It is distinguished from supralapsarianism, my love, by—but on second thoughts, as you have done without the knowledge a long time without suffering any sensible inconvenience, you may as well go on not knowing."

"With all my heart. But what is said about Mr. Grafton is, that when he was a young man he got into all sorts of entanglements, some of them not of a very honorable character."

"Pecuniary, of course?"

"Yes, and of another sort, and both connected together."

"I am equally entangled in your mystery."

"We have dined at the rectory three times, you remember, William."

"Yes, and as I am a thin man I pay most attention to the eating, which was very good. I heard hints that the less of the wine one took the better. I took very little, and I don't seem to remember a headache, which is more than I can say of the next day after a Bulliman dinner."

"Don't be hard on poor Mr. Bulliman. It is her fault. She checks the wine-bill, and says that it is un-Christian to pay nine shillings a bottle for claret while a single Hottentot is unable to read the Bible."

"Does she apply the rule to her own milliner's bills, as that would be more apposite? She dresses sumptuously. However, I shall not have it out with her, as I shall dine there no more. What imports the nomination of the rectory dinner?"

"Why," said Mrs. Conway, making a successful shot at his meaning, "do you recollect that upon two occasions, but not the last, there dined a dark-looking lady, who was both times said to be staying in the house? She was in black velvet, if you ever noticed a woman's dress."

"Did not I just show that I noticed Mrs. Bulliman's? Yes, I remember that lady perfectly well. What skeleton does she represent, what horror does she embody? Is the rector a bigamist, and is she one of his wives? We ought not to visit him?"

"No, but it is curious that your nonsense has come not so very far from the truth, if it be truth that the people speak. It is believed that Mr. Grafton did marry when he was young, and married disreputably. That wife is dead."

"I am glad of that, for the sake of the kind, lady-like woman now known as Mrs. Grafton, Edward's mother. By-the-way, is that another jump in the dark? Is she Edward's mother?"

"Oh yes, that is certain. He was born in the parish, to which his father came soon after the second marriage, bringing Mrs. Grafton as a bride. But the lady we speak of is in some way connected with the first wife."

"Well, but, my dear, what is there in that? Mrs. Grafton knows, of course, of the early folly, and if her husband has explained to her that this person, what *is* her name—Sulton—something—"

"Sullage—they call her Mrs. Sullage."

"Probably because she married a Mr. Sullage. The reason is not altogether bad. Well, if Mrs. Grafton accepts this lady's visits, we must suppose that it is all right."

"If you would only let me explain. They say that Mrs. Grafton hates and fears this woman, and that it is only in consequence of the strongest pressure on the part of the rector that his wife even consents to be in the house with her.'

"But if Mrs. Sullage be an objectionable character, you and Magdalen ought not to have been asked to the house."

"I do not understand that she is objectionable in that sense, but that she knows something so bad about the proud old rector that he is compelled to force her upon his wife and her guests whenever she chooses to come."

"Now I should much like to know," said Mr. Conway, "out of what flimsy materials the Naybury gossips have made a story that sounds alarmingly like what one has read in a good many bad novels."

"I did not like to tell you before, though I would have done so if the affair between Magdalen and Edward Grafton had not been instantly broken off by her. The story was partly suspected for a long time, but much new light was thrown on it by Edward himself."

"Filial conduct. His father has behaved well to *him*, at any rate."

"That, also, may not be so certain. But I do not know enough about that to warrant my saying any thing. Edward revealed some of the other part of the story one night at a certain house in Naybury, when he had had more than was good for him."

"And who was hospitable enough to make a young fellow tipsy, and then betray his foolish revelations?"

"There has been no betrayal, my dear William. The person who heard it did so most reluctantly, and has kept the secret."

"How can that be? Whose house was it?"

"Yours."

"This. And who heard the story?"

"I."

"You, Mary?"

"Yes. Edward was, at the time, at Cambridge, and had come to the rectory in consequence of a summons from his father. You were, at the time, in London, at the laying the first stone of your cousin's church. Edward Grafton came here in a state of much excitement, but not from drink. But a very little drink, which he insisted on having, simply set him maundering, and he began accusations of such a kind against his father, and in reference to Mrs. Sullage, that I was driven to do a prompt thing, and I am sure a right one. If I had a son, and he could so act, I hope that a mother who might be with him would do as I did. I resolved that the servants should hear nothing of his talk, and I gave him the strongest opiate I dared. He slept on a sofa, and next morning was gone. Am I not to be trusted with a secret?"

CHAPTER X.

HONOR A NILO.

ADMIRABLY well as Magdalen Conway had behaved—and knew that she had behaved—during the stormy interview with Edward Grafton before the cottage of Mrs. Faunt, the young lady reached her home in no triumphant state of mind. At a very early period in her homeward walk her lofty mood had become subdued, and sad as it may be to admit the fact in regard to a heroine, she largely partook of the dispositions of which Sir Hugh Evans accuses himself while endeavoring to sing. Magdalen indeed was very much inclined to cry. But, happily, she met no one whose greeting or whose talk was in the slightest degree sympathetic; and though she felt by no means grateful to two or three acquaintances whose well-meant boredom compelled her into the commonplaces of casual chatter, she was really conscious that such meetings had acted somewhat bracingly upon her. Hastening to the house, and avoiding conversation with her parents, Magdalen locked herself into her room for a little counsel with herself.

Into the various turns and phases of that consultation it were not discreet to enter, but it is well that something should be known of the course of Magdalen's thoughts, the rather that such knowledge will illustrate some of the past passages in her history.

The scene with Edward Grafton seemed to have retreated, and to have become an event of some time back instead of a dialogue of an hour ago. In place of the active displeasure which Magdalen had felt during the conversation there had arisen a general sense of discomfort and disturbance, and a gentle-natured girl felt that a hostile influence had been set up against her, and that it would cause her trouble and grief. But this was not the thought which rose up strongly and persistently. That thought was connected with her affianced husband.

Trained to self-examination, Magdalen, almost as soon as she became conscious that something of apprehension, something of dissatisfaction was growing up within her in regard to Ernest Dormer, suddenly turned sternly upon herself, and demanded whether such feelings owed any thing to the words of Edward Grafton. For they had been bitter and menacing words, and though she had dashed aside his slanderous imputations, they were of a kind to be remembered involuntarily, and to bear fruit in bad season. From any such suspicion Magdalen believed that she was free. She thought that she should despise herself if the avowedly hostile tongue of a rejected lover could work injury to Ernest with one who had promised to be his wife. She placed before her Grafton's conduct and its motives, and she convinced herself that what was prompted so despicably was altogether without influence upon herself. And in self-justification from the charge which she had imagined, Magdalen recurred to her feelings before leaving home in the morning and after reading Dormer's letter. This confirmed her in her belief that all which she felt as to her lover she had felt before he had been attacked; but it is hardly necessary to tell a woman-reader that the conviction brought no accession of comfort to poor Magdalen. Somehow she wished that she had not done Ernest so much justice, when the

idea that she had done him a little injustice would have strengthened her in another way.

However, there was his letter, his kind, graceful, loving letter, and Magdalen read it again and again. It seemed very spontaneously written; but if Magdalen Conway had only known the pains the writer had taken with the composition, and what we may call the honest art with which he had sought to make it inartificial, and to remove from it all appearance of the effort with which it was really framed, it may be doubted whether Miss Conway would have deigned to look at it so earnestly, and to try to see in it that without which the most charming epistle is—to a woman—worthless in comparison with the clumsiest utterance of a genuine feeling. Ernest had tested his work very severely, by such means as were within his power, and he had rewritten his letter twice, and, finally, had done very well. But the touch-stone, reluctantly applied, gave a merciless verdict. The metal was not genuine, and poor Magdalen knew that though her eyes blinded themselves with tears her heart failed not to see the fatal signs.

It was not—be it said to her best credit—while this conviction agitated and even angered her, that Magdalen permitted any of the worldly features of her case to present themselves to the detriment of Ernest Dormer. Something nobler than a girl's grief, something of a woman's sorrow came upon her, and it was over herself and her own outraged heart that she brooded in the first mood of an unrequited affection—shall we say during the mood of selfishness? The word is ungracious, but it is certain that a woman, in this stage of trouble, is self-engrossed, and it is not for us to offer apologies for nature. But the sorrow rises high above the sentiment which prompts accusation or reproach. There was no harsh thought for Ernest Dormer, as his affianced wife sat with her head between her hands, and, swaying slowly backward and forward, accepted—no, submitted to the truth—that she was not loved.

"And I would have loved him so well," she said, in a low voice.

Would have loved him.

With which words begins another page in the book of Magdalen's history.

Plainly, for we would have no riddles, it may be said that at all events she had not loved him as yet.

We must therefore look back for a little into her history. It will be considered a fair measure of frankness if as much is told about Magdalen Conway as is known to Ernest Dormer, who is engaged to marry her.

Magdalen, the only child of William and Mary Conway, had been carefully educated by their side until she was about sixteen. After what has already been said, it is needless to add that she had been idolized, but could not be spoiled, by her parents, and that in the only school in which those who appreciate the treasure sent in the form of a daughter will ever allow her to study, the school of a home where love is, Magdalen had acquired the graces of education, without losing certain good gifts too often found to have been left behind, like schoolmistress's perquisites, when a girl is withdrawn from a stranger's care. Pure, *naïve*, bright, and affectionate, Magdalen Conway grew up beside her natural protectors, and repaid their protection tenfold. The instruction which she had received was of the best kind. Her mother, though imperfectly educated, had the soundest sense as well as the kindest heart, was perfectly aware of her own defects, and as perfectly determined that they should not be reproduced in Magdalen. A practical woman, Mary Conway, with her husband's aid, selected the teaching she could not direct, and she made no mistakes. Mr. Conway's more refined intellect bore its share in aiding the progress of Magdalen, and not the least delightful passages in her life were the quaint disputations in which her father loved to engage her upon the subjects of her studies, and she owed much to the stores which at such times he poured out from the resources of a powerful memory, and which he garnished with a curious and pleasant subtlety peculiar to himself. Magdalen had therefore much beyond the ordinary accomplishments when she reached the age of sixteen, and though she had never read a French novel surreptitiously, or privately discussed, with other girls, the probable merits of an Italian master as a lover, she was not otherwise the inferior of the average of young ladies who have been Finished out of the home of their parents.

But it happened that though Magdalen had received the usual amount of religious education, as imparted in families where religion is taken somewhat easily—that is to say, though she regularly accompanied her mother to church, had learned the catechism, and was reasonably well up in the history of the Hebrew kings and the voyages of St. Paul—no one had taken the pains to fence her round with the bulwarks of orthodox Protestantism, or to inspire her with the conviction that Pius the Ninth was the prophesied representative of Antichrist. And this omission of theological accomplishments led to a curious result. For Magdalen, at about the period of life which has been mentioned, was allowed to pay a somewhat prolonged visit to some relations of her mother. They lived in South Wales, and they were Catholics. It was during the time when the Conways were much occupied with the law-struggle which ended so successfully for them and so injuriously to the Captain who drank boiled rum, and it is possible that the father and mother did not pay such close attention to the state of Magdalen's mind, as disclosed in her letters, as they should have done.

But without any particular effort at her conversion on the part of the two pretty Catholic girls in the family in which she was sojourning, Magdalen slid quietly and acquiescently into the ways of the Papist household, and though she did not proceed to the step of professing the old creed—let it be interpolated that

the Haslops were ladies and gentlemen, and would have taken no spiritual advantage of the unformed nature of a girl—Miss Conway became as much of a Catholic as she could be without doing the only thing which, according to that Church, is of the least use at all in regard to our hereafter. Had she remained in Wales it is far from improbable that she might have conformed to the religion of her friends, to which disaster would have been added another, for this book would not have been written. But those who had loved her best wearied for her bright eyes and soft hands and merry voice, and they reclaimed her as soon as the furious Captain had signified that, the decision of law having once gone against him, he would fight no more, and every body had his free leave to go where Virgil took Dante. Miss Conway came to Naybury nominally a Protestant, but with a great many Catholic influences at work within her, and it may be that the keen and orthodox reader has already had the sagacity to trace some of these in regard to her dealings with the poor and with herself.

Of Edward Grafton's early attachment to Magdalen, and of its ill-fortune, we have heard. Miss Conway was never for a moment inclined to listen to the suit of the young clergyman, and had never given him the slightest encouragement. His courtship had been nipped in its earliest bud, and Magdalen had had no reason to suppose that he would venture to make any fresh manifestation of his feelings toward her. She had been as much surprised as offended at the outbreak upon which he had presumed that day. But she was older now, by more than two years, than when Edward Grafton had first addressed her, and when she came to review all the circumstances of the case the beautiful Magdalen began to think that her surprise was somewhat uncalled for. A train of reflections arose which, if it were not favorable to Edward Grafton, was not exactly advantageous to the interest of Ernest Dormer, though Magdalen was unconscious of its tendency.

Into the subtler workings of the heart of Magdalen Conway, under the influences of the incidents of the day, we may obtain a later insight. For the moment we will glance, in a more worldly way than she did, at the outside aspects of her engagement to Mr. Dormer. Magdalen had first met him at her father's table. The Conways usually made a brief visit to London during the season, and thus kept up many of the acquaintances of their younger days. Mrs. Conway, especially, who liked her own relations, and secretly thought a family party the most pleasant thing in the world, always pressed this visit upon her William, who would perhaps have been content to preserve the family ties by means of correspondence, and who was a little heterodox as to the sacred duties of cousinhood and the like. But when in town he played the courteous lord and bounteous host, and even took pains to vary the affectionate monotony of Mrs. Conway's consanguineous gatherings by inserting guests who could relieve the anecdotes of infantine epigrams and adolescent chicken-pox by something more tolerable to human reason. Mr. Conway had become acquainted, professionally, with a good many members of scientific societies, and he was rather fond of haunting their meetings, and carrying away odd scraps of fact or theory for his private delectation.

One fine night he found himself a constituent of a well-dressed crowd that was rather discontentedly parading the area of Burlington House. A star of the first magnitude was making a speech in the large room on the left, which could not contain a quarter of the persons who were desirous to be able to discomfit other persons at their dinners during the rest of the week by an early description of the great traveler whose return to England made the sensation of the moment. The room had been crammed by those whose zeal for knowledge or for the reputation thereof had been fiery enough to induce them to dine an hour earlier than usual; and these, packed in dense discomfort, were nevertheless greatly refreshed and consoled by hearing the constant arrival of carriages and the angry voices of many women scolding those who had not been able to get them out of their houses in decent time. Active young philosophers swarmed up from the pavement to the window-ledges, and obtained occasional glances at the star, and sometimes caught a word of his oratory. But the majority of the disappointed ones walked up and down, and the men lit cigars and formed groups; and when the ladies had delivered themselves of their anger against the impertinent people who had dared to be in time, had sufficiently rebuked the husbands who had failed to procure entrance, and had driven away, the outside meeting became rather pleasant, and to the wise man, who knew that he could read every word of the great traveler's speech comfortably in the *Athenæum* on the following Saturday, the exclusion from the stifling room was not one of the great grievances of his life. Mr. Conway, however, who was undoubtedly a fidget, was very unhappy at having been induced by a friend to linger over their claret at a neighboring club until his getting into the room was impossible. He tried the door again and again, enduring rebuke from those around it, and he even sprang up with much energy and thrust his head among the legs of the men on the window-ledges in his desire to behold the man who had beheld the African river. But his exertions were futile, until one of the men whom he had butted, and who had looked down at first in wrath, and then with a gentler feeling when he saw the white hair and the intellectual face below him, said, kindly:

"If you care about perching here, Sir, you shall have my place."

So the first filial office which Ernest Dormer performed for the father of Magdalen was to heave that unknown gentleman up to a window-sill, that he might crane into the room of the Geographical Society.

"If you were a marrying man, Ernest," said a friend, tendering his cigar-case to Dormer, "I should say that you had done a good thing for yourself."

"Thanks. Yes?"

"Yes. Rich old country swell—only one daughter—an out-and-out beauty. I am sold or otherwise disposed of or I wouldn't tell you. As she can be no good to me I'll introduce you."

"I don't seem to care about it," said Ernest. "But I like his look. If he comes down before I have finished my weed you may."

Auctioneers do not announce sales "by inch of candle" now, so that illustration will be lost on the present generation. But here was Magdalen Conway's destiny flickering on three inches of tobacco. Two of them had vanished, when a rattling storm of applause announced that the great African traveler had finished his manly and modest narrative. Mr. Conway looked round, and the height, nothing to five-and-twenty, but something to nine-and-fifty, gave him pause. Ernest Dormer's strong arm was instantly at his service.

"I can hardly say how much obliged to you I am," said Mr. Conway, as he reached the Burlington *pavé*. "I heard capitally, and I only regret to have deprived you of the same pleasure."

"You can easily make it up to him, my dear Conway," said the friend who had spoken to Ernest. This was Mr. Charles Melbush, a young barrister who knew every body, and whom every body liked, and who was thought to be more deficient in the organ of veneration than any gentlemen of the day, though that is much to say in an age of comic literature. He had once met Mr. Conway in the country, on some quarter-sessions business, and had taken him under gracious protection for the rest of his natural life.

"I am sure I should like to know how, Mr. Melbush," said the older gentleman, smiling.

"Ask him to dinner. He is perfectly respectable, and in fact rather distinguished. When I add that he is a particular friend of mine, my dear Conway, only two things more are necessary. One is that when you ask him you must ask me, and the other is that you should know his name. Mr. Ernest Dormer—Mr. Conway."

It was all said with such coolness and slowness that it would have seemed impertinent but that the tone was a gentleman's, and you could not look at Charles Melbush without liking him, and making up your mind that you did not care what he said to you.

Mr. Conway, who was really grateful for the pleasure which Ernest had allowed him to enjoy, did ask the two men to dinner at a very early date, and so Magdalen met Dormer. He was placed next her at the feast. As usual, that banquet was largely eaten by relations. Ernest managed to interest her in a little discussion or two on some books and some pictures, in spite of the absorbing theme of the meeting, the story of a frightful adventure of a child of one of the matrons, a boy who had fallen down in the mud while crossing a street, and who would perhaps have been run over and killed but for Providence and the fact that no vehicle was in sight.

The acquaintance thus made was kept up, for all parties were pleased. Mr. Conway always retained his original feeling of gratitude for the little civility which introduced him to Ernest. Mrs. Conway speedily learned to like him, and those who knew her best believed that her regard for Dormer had been finally fixed and consolidated by the extreme sympathy which he showed at a time when an infant niece of Mrs. Conway's had been suffering under one of the complaints of childhood. Dormer seemed to know so much about the symptoms and the proper treatment that a shrewd lady like Magdalen's mamma could hardly fail to ask how a single young gentleman had acquired so much information on subjects not usually within the province of his order. Ernest must have managed to give a satisfactory explanation, and Mrs. Conway thenceforth thought exceedingly well of him. It is often the quarter of an hour which we think most wasted which tells most importantly upon our future.

When the Conways returned to the country Ernest Dormer received several invitations to visit Naybury. But he always found it impossible to accept any of them, and this was something of a puzzle to the family. They knew that he went elsewhere, and as he had no profession, except that he was understood to be in some way connected with literature, the Conways could not comprehend why he always had to express his great regret that he was once more deprived of the opportunity of seeing Naybury.

But he came at last, and when he was not even invited, beyond his having been often assured that he could never come at a wrong time. He had corresponded with Mr. Conway, who liked writing letters, and thought nothing of giving up a morning to the verification of a quotation which he wished to use apropos of something in a friend's epistle. He seldom wrote direct to Mrs. Conway, but was too observant of the proprieties, and indeed liked her too well, to omit kind messages, and he always sent some merry message to Magdalen. But it had been a matter of remark in their house that they had not heard from him for a long while when he walked into the breakfast-parlor, and for the first time visited Magdalen in her own home. His visit was none the less welcome for being unexpected, and he soon found that whatever his object might be, he should have all the advantages of a sincere liking on the part of at least two out of the three who made that pleasant and happy household.

It was very soon seen that he came with an object, and if Mrs. Conway was the first to discover it, the feat of sagacity was not a great one,

for Ernest Dormer seemed inclined not only to make no secret of his purpose, but to promote it with somewhat more than the ordinary speed of a first-class matrimonial train. He put himself in the way of being asked questions about himself, and his explanations were so ample and frank that even William Conway smiled knowingly at his wife when they compared notes. As no hint was given to Magdalen to avoid Mr. Dormer's private society, and as she was not instructed to receive a letter inviting her to visit relations, it might be surmised that the parents saw no reason for interference. So the young people met in the garden before breakfast, and had much chat in the room afterward, while Mr. Conway inspected his green-house, and Mrs. Conway, her own housekeeper, had debate on stores and estimates. They also talked a good deal in the garden, and the parrot, though he commentated, did not reprove. They rode together, and together inspected the ruins of Naybury Castle, which they found very interesting, and worthy of a long investigation. They did not make any visits together, for Dormer and Magdalen found that among many points of agreement both detested calls; but Ernest Dormer accompanied Magdalen on some of her missions to the poor, and was seen of the Julls, Widgeons, and Mrs. Faunt. He did not say much to any of these folks. Magdalen, who was disposed to think well of all he did, placed his silence and his generally waiting outside the cottages to the account of his good taste—he did not wish her name to be needlessly coupled with his own, especially by a class that is very ready with the broadest of hints and the most solemn of congratulations. That might have been his reason.

Of course the end of it all was that he was permitted to seek a readily conceded interview with Mr. and Mrs. Conway, and perhaps no young gentleman was ever more agreeably helped along in his declarations and explanations than was Ernest Dormer by these kindly Conways. As for mamma, she nearly took all the work upon herself, and half scolded her husband for putting a few questions to his proposed son-in-law. Ernest Dormer, however, was allowed to state that he was without an income, except a few hundreds which he gained by his pen, but that certain near relations, Mr. and Mrs. Stepney, the latter of whom was sister to his deceased mother, were ready, on his marriage, to transfer to him certain property which had formerly belonged to his parents, and this would enable him to make a settlement on his wife. It is needless to add that he used extremely becoming and adoring language in speaking to the parents concerning that young lady, or that they thoroughly agreed in all that he was pleased to say in her favor.

The consent of the Conways was given with a willingness which caused private surprise to Ernest. And he was by no means in such a state of ecstasy at the attainment of his suit as to prevent his taking especial note of all that occurred. It is strange, too, he said to himself as he went into the garden, where he had a not unfounded idea that Miss Conway would happen to come after his interview with her parents—it is strange that there was one thing which they did not say. Magdalen is their idol, and the sunshine of their house, and the one object of all their care, and yet neither of them said that it would be a great sorrow to them to lose her.

And the reason why they had not said this one thing may be supplied by those who recollect the earliest conversation at the Octagon touching Dormer's marriage. With the usual lack of hesitation evinced by young clubbists in making statements, Mr. Launceston declared that the marriage was broken off on account of a condition with which Ernest afterward agreed to comply. That was not so—the match was never put into jeopardy on that ground. But the condition was imposed, and Ernest Dormer had said to Milwarden that he did not quite see his way about one stipulation, and Milwarden had said to Dalston that there was a hitch, and Dalston had said to Rydon that there had been a row, and Rydon had said to Alford that the affair had blown up, and Alford had said to Marsden that the parents had thrown Ernest over, and Marsden had said to Clyde that he had better say nothing, but that it had come near to kicking Ernest out of the house, and Clyde had said to Daimes that Dormer would not show at the club for a long time, and as just then Dormer walked into the club with Latrobe it was perceived that some modification of the story was obviously necessary, so Latrobe was whispered to, and as Latrobe whispered to women only he told Ernest Dormer what he had heard, and Dormer desired him to deny the whole statement. Which Colonel Latrobe did, with no particular softness of terms; but too much gossip had been spread to allow the tale to be entirely demolished, and it was reduced to the version which Launceston had given Wigram, namely, that things had been squared. It is not every club-fiction that is brought down to such harmless dimensions.

Things had not been squared, however, for they needed no squaring. After the Conways had given their consent to the marriage, and Ernest Dormer had imparted this fact to Magdalen, the parents had come out to the engaged couple, and spoken, with moistened eyes, what all loving parents have felt when delegating a precious charge to the keeping of another.

"This is your home, Ernest," Mrs. Conway had said, holding his hand.

He had accepted the words, at the moment, in the kindliest sense, but not literally, and it was not until, in the next private talk with his affianced Magdalen, he had begun to consult her as to the quarter of London in which she would like to live, and had prepared himself to say what would make her decide irrevocably against one particular quarter, that Magdalen made him see that her parents would never part with her.

"Did you not notice what mamma said, dear? This is your home?"

"Yes, dearest. But though I dare say mamma will like to see a good deal of us, we are not to quarter ourselves upon her," he said, smiling.

"But that is exactly what she means, what they both mean. They will never agree to our living any where but in this house."

"In this house?" repeated Ernest.

"Yes, dear. Is the idea so dreadful?"

"Dreadful," he said, laughing; "where could we find a better? But I fancy, Magdalen, that you have made a sort of mistake."

"But I never make mistakes, Sir. Dear Ernest, you may believe what I tell you. It would break their hearts to think that you would take me away to another home. They have always said that nothing should part us. And, Sir, is it not a great thing in you that you have made yourself so acceptable that they not only allow you to take me, but insist on your coming to live with them? Are you not proud of yourself, a little, just a little?"

"Of you, Magdalen, and so proud that I have no room for pride on my own account. But this plan takes me quite by surprise."

"There is plenty of room in the house," said Magdalen, simply; "and I am sure that we shall be allowed—no, be ordered to choose whatever part we like to have, and our—"

What made Magdalen break off her sentence, and why she did not seem to know how to take it up again, and why she flushed, and appeared vexed, and might have been about to cry, yet might not have been able to say why, are questions which did not appear to disquiet Ernest, who drew her close to him, and after some moments of eloquent silence said something which sent that little frown, of which mention has been made, to her fair brow, and then that smile, of which it was ever the harbinger, to her lips.

This was all the squaring that ever was done, and mathematics were never much more agreeably practiced.

The story, to which we have had to recur, needs little addition. The period of engagement was not to be a long one, and it was drawing to its end when the banquet at the Octagon was given. The Conways, who had yielded Magdalen to Dormer, were not likely to be distrustful of him in regard to the world's affairs, but the business arrangements were conducted with due detail, and nothing could be more satisfactory than the report which Mr. Conway's solicitor sent down touching his interview with Mr. and Mrs. Stepney, whose expressions of kind hope for their nephew's happiness quite touched the hard old lawyer. He was desirous to convey the impression they had created upon him, but being something inapt at sentimental writing stated that they could be more easily conceived than described, a burst of eloquence which made Magdalen laugh out with delight.

Ernest Dormer had paid the last visit which he was to make to Naybury until he should come for his bride. It was during the interval that our story began—it was during the interval that Magdalen received the letter with which she has shut herself up while we have been telling what it was necessary that the reader should know. Why should not Ernest and Magdalen be happy? He is young, manly, accomplished, kindly. She is beautiful, good, affectionate. Her heart was disengaged, and as for a man's heart, it is an anatomical expression. The world smiles on them, they marry with the approbation of friends, and a delightful home awaits them, one that will be their own in future days.

Nevertheless, the letter may not have tended to the promotion of the happiness we hope to see. But girlhood is not altogether reasonable, and girls grow wiser when they are wed.

CHAPTER XI.

DORCAS AT HOME.

THE Naybury Dorcas Society mustered in unusual force in the school-room at Mrs. Bulliman's house on the first meeting-night after the lecture of Mr. Yotes, the missionary. The matrons and maidens who composed that association said to one another, when they met in the shops or in the streets, that the interesting details which good Mr. Yotes had given them in respect to the natives of Madagascar would form a very delightful subject for conversation while the needles were at work for the poor. But it had been rumored that the curate of Saxbury had said something to dear Mrs. Bulliman which might also occupy the consideration of the little assembly. This item in the order of the day was not dwelt upon out of doors, but every one felt that it had a good deal to do with the handsome attendance of members.

Can it be necessary to inform any body that Dorcas was a good woman who made clothes for the poor in the days of the apostles, and that in the days of their successors, the primates and bishops of the Church of England, there are numerous places where good and religious ladies form working clubs for the same excellent purpose, and which clubs meet, in rotation, at the houses of the members. The system is adopted both by Church-people and by Dissenters, and the motive power is the same in each case, but the proceedings vary. Some Dorcas societies simply meet and work and talk, others are opened by clergy, with solemn religious ceremonial, like the Crystal Palace (where we saw Blondin, and the female jockeys); others, again, have no theological rites, but it is understood that the conversation is to be of the kind which is called serious.

Mrs. Bulliman, who was the Grand Mistress of the Dorcas Lodge in Naybury, had sanctioned a sort of compromise. For although she was disposed to be a little despotic with the poor, and although she might be thought to be somewhat too proclamatory of her own beliefs, and

of the exceeding ignorance, not to say sinfulness of all who did not share them, Sarah Bulliman was not a bad sort of a woman, and had occasional tendencies to jollity. She really meant exceedingly well, and if every body else in church and state generally, and in Naybury—and Saxbury—in particular, would only have conformed to her rules and decrees, she would never have had an unkind word for any body but Roman Catholics. Against the faith and deeds of those unfortunate misbelievers she regarded it her duty to protest at all times, in season and out of season, and notably the latter, and she had not the faintest hesitation in attributing the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny, and every other affliction which has come upon us to the fatal error of 1829. But, deducting these and a few kindred matters, Mrs. Bulliman was a better woman than a great many who abused her continually, and always accepted her invitations to dinner. In regard to her Dorcas meetings, she behaved with much sense. She gave her ladies very good strong tea, and the accessories were liberally supplied. She had no regular solemnities, but if a clergyman happened to come in (and few clergymen's wives made such tea) and he felt inclined to improve the occasion, there was the little table and the good book, or if he happened to read secular composition with any decency, the last volume of missionary research or the last memoir of some pious soldier was sure to be at hand, and the clerical man was invited to display his elocution. On the whole, however, though the fact was never owned, the Dorcasians were best pleased when the clergy took tea at home, and inflicted their reading upon their own families.

This evening it was matter of special hope—to say the least—that no clerical man would come. For though the ladies of Naybury were quite as shrewd as the ladies of London or any other place where folks think, like Job's friends, that they alone are The people and that wisdom shall die with them, and though they knew perfectly well that a clergyman is too conscientious to recoil from the painful duty of hearing or pointing out the errors of a brother priest, the sacrifice can be much more satisfactorily dissected without the aid of a superintending flamen. Freedom of discussion is much checked when a speaker has to recollect the presence of a spiritual chief. And though the matrons of Naybury were brave, and unaccustomed to yield any slavish deference to their clerical men, and especially treated curates with familiarity, the young ladies were very reserved in their expressions of opinion when an unmarried clergyman was present. In the middle of Devizes is a memorial of a female who came to grief for telling a lie, but in every town is the unreared but enduring memorial of some girl who has come to grief by an unguarded utterance of truth. In Naybury itself there was a fearful legend of a thoughtless young lady who was engaged to a lawyer, and who was cruelly discarded for anticipating the time at which she could with impunity have hazarded her flippant allegation that all lawyers were cheats. The name of Minnie Welton, and the home in which she still lived—an old maid—were warnings at least as effective as the profane stone of Devizes.

Mr. Bulliman happened to be the owner of his house, and the nominal head of the family, and theoretically he had of course the right to enter any room in his own mansion and converse with the guests who assembled under his roof. But a Tory who was a member of the Privy Council would as soon have thought of insisting on his right to sit down with a Liberal Cabinet and advise her Majesty. Once, at a meeting near Christmas time, Mr. Bulliman had ventured to send in a note, humbly representing to his wife that the snow was on the ground, and that if some hot negus would be acceptable to the ladies before they departed he should be only too much honored in brewing it; but the verbal answer was so discouraging that Mr. Bulliman took himself away to a card party (he was carnal) and was heard of no more for hours. But it shall be recorded to Mrs. Bulliman's honor, that though she conscientiously resisted this attempt at the beginning of an encroachment, she did but wait to ascertain that her husband was quite out of the way, and then she ordered up an ample supply of the comfortable beverage which he had suggested, using for the manufacture a very high class of port, for the purchase of which she had, on religious principles, severely reprehended the epicurean Bulliman.

One would not insult the Dorcas Association of Naybury by comparing it to a certain assembly which meets at Westminster, but in one respect an irreverent person (only there were no irreverent Dorcasians) might have been reminded of certain nights with the Speaker. When it had been arranged that some public business shall be taken first, and afterward a personal matter, the extreme flatness of the earlier debate is a delightful contrast to the point of the second, and the bored but conscientious attention given to the country's affairs is an admirable foil to the sudden waking up of the House, when the Accuser, with a glistening eye, but a look of sincere grief, begins to regret, in his best manner, the painful necessity of entering into a damaging detail.

The tea-cups had disappeared, the circle, with its outlying groups, had been formed, and the various bags in which the work had been sent to Mrs. Bulliman's house lay at the feet of their respective owners. And the sight was a pretty and pleasant one, and the hands were kindly engaged. Also the little incidents were pleasing, as when a puzzled young lady held out a very tiny garment to her neighbor, and implored advice as to what she was to do to it—of course it had been cut out for her—or when a couple of matrons, observing the younger creatures, exchange a whisper and a smile, the latter rather complacent than mirthful. Then came what was equivalent to Mr. Lefevre's command that the

clerk do now proceed to read the orders of the day.

"Phœbe," said Mrs. Bulliman to her daughter, "what did dear Mr. Yotes say the poor natives themselves called Madagascar?—the word escapes me constantly."

"Madacasse, mamma."

"Yes, that is it. We see how the name has been corrupted by Europeans. Would that were the only corruption they have spread there!"

"Ah, indeed!" said somebody, sighing.

"He paid, I thought, quite as many compliments to the French missionaries as were necessary," said Mrs. Cutcheon, a very grim-looking Dorcas, whose face did not convey the impression that many compliments had been paid to her.

"It was the mistake in his lecture, my dear," said Mrs. Bulliman, "and I told him so before Mr. Watkinson and the committee."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, I thought very weakly, that he had himself witnessed the efforts of the French, and their devotion, and that his account would have been incomplete if he had not done them justice."

"But I like him for that," said Miss Fanny Buxton, incautiously.

"I grieve to hear you say so, Fanny," said Mrs. Bulliman.

"But is it not right," asked Fanny, her pretty face coloring, but her courage holding up, "to bear truthful witness for those who are doing their best?"

"Their best, Fanny?" said Mrs. Bulliman, sternly rending a great piece of calico in twain. "Your excellent mother is not here to be pained by so thoughtless an expression. Their best—when they are laboring to spread their own false religion among these poor islanders!"

But that worldly little Fanny was not quite crushed.

"Surely, Mrs. Bulliman, the Catholic religion, with all its errors, must be better than the idolatry of the natives."

"The Roman Catholic religion, Fanny," said Mrs. Bulliman, who had the bump of locality, "is itself idolatry, and fearful is the responsibility of those who countenance any effort to spread it. I think, my dear," she added, in a very superior manner, "that you are imperfectly informed on a vital question, and perhaps you would do well to talk it over with dear Phœbe and dear Sophia before you express any farther opinion on the subject."

Whether Fanny Buxton were crushed by the argument or not, it is certain that she felt appalled at the invitation to combat with the two gaunt champions of the faith, and she gladly availed herself of a gusset difficulty to turn to a neighbor.

"Did you hear what was collected, Mrs. Bulliman?" asked Mrs. Turner, good-naturedly. She did not care a farthing, but she wanted to take the Protestant matron off the poor little girl.

"I am almost ashamed to say. Perhaps, as I told Mr. Yotes, some may have held their hands in displeasure at his uncalled-for praises of the Roman Catholic emissaries. I felt something of that inclination, but I suppressed it because I thought that my example might be misconstrued."

"But you have not said how much."

"Guess, my dear."

"Chervil said that there were a hundred people in the room."

"He had better have been listening than counting, and then perhaps he would have been inclined to behave more liberally than he did. I saw him put in sixpence."

"The new plate-glass window and architectural front to his shop cost him seventy pounds," said Mrs. Gilbert, and she said it in so perfectly unemphasized a way that no one could tell whether she meant that poor Mr. Chervil, having been put to heavy expenses, could not just now afford much charity, or whether it would have been better for wicked Mr. Chervil to consider the claims of the heathen before wasting his substance on riotous architecture.

"Chervil makes professions," said Mrs. Bulliman, "but I prefer acts. It is painful to see that he is any thing but sincere. Few chemists are."

"I fear so," said Mrs. Mainwaring. Yet that lady had no particular cause to complain of chemical insincerity, for this very Mr. Chervil had distinctly told her, two days before, that it was of no use his selling her anodynes for neuralgia, inasmuch as she had no neuralgia at all, but toothache, for her teeth were old and ought to be stopped.

"It is sad, but it is true," said Mrs. Bulliman. "They get reading those dreadful German writers, my dear, and they become materialists—I had better say infidels."

"I do not think that Mr. Chervil has reached that awful stage," said Mrs. Turner.

"We all hope not," said Mrs. Bulliman. "But I heard him myself in explaining something in geology to Mrs. De Gully—who might do better than encourage a tradesman to fancy himself a philosopher—I heard him use the words 'the Mosaic account of the Deluge.' When I hear that sneer I know that all is over, and that it is only a question of prudence whether a man will or will not deny all revelation and the existence of a Deity."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Mainwaring, who was the most literal of believers, and took the Lowther Arcade view of Noah's Ark.

"But I have not told you the amount of the collection for the Madagascan mission," said the hostess. "I asked you to guess, my dear," she added, to Mrs. Turner, for Mrs. Bulliman had no notion of letting her requests be regarded as other than commands.

"A hundred people? Let me see," said Mrs. Turner. "I know I gave half a crown," she said, smiling, and without the slightest intention of making proclamation of liberality—it was merely to help her on while she considered.

"I do not think that any one is called upon to say what she might feel able or inclined to put into the plate," said Mrs. Cutcheon, severely.

"Certainly not," said two or three of the elder ladies at once, while two or three of the younger ones seemed for the moment to bestow extra diligence on their work.

"I did not mean it in that sense," said Mrs. Turner, "and I am sure it is nothing to make a merit of, for Mr. Yotes's heart-rending stories about those poor little children that were murdered made me cry to that degree that I hardly knew what I did, and I only wanted to get home, and thank God that my own dear ones were all safe in bed."

"My children were with me," said Mrs. Gilbert, emitting the words with no more emphasis than is in the sound of falling water. Did she mean that she sat happy with her own dear ones beside her, or that Mrs. Turner ought to have brought her children to improve their hearts and dreams by a lecture on the slaughtered little heathen? This power of virtuous *double entendre* was of great value to Mrs. Gilbert, for she never got into a quarrel, though she always left her friends at liberty to torment themselves with the thought that she had given them a severe castigation.

"I would not have had mine there on any account," said Mrs. Turner. "Other people can do as they please; but I do not choose to torment my little ones with dreadful tales, enough to give them the nightmare."

"Of course other people can do as they please," said Mrs. Bulliman, recognizing rebel utterances. "You need not tell us that, my dear. Another consideration, and one which is much more to the purpose is, whether a parent is justified in depriving a child of the privilege of knowing the state of the heathen, and of becoming aware early that the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty."

Mrs. Turner very seldom fought about any thing else, but she was always ready to give battle for her own children, or for any body else's, and she would not be put down even by a text. She replied with some energy that she had not much belief in the tenderness of parents who took children where they were made miserable. While Mrs. Gilbert was preparing one of her amphisbænic sentences, Mrs. Bulliman said, loftily:

"We have not been acquainted long enough, Mrs. Turner, for you to be aware that from the earliest age my girls, Phœbe and Sophia, have attended every missionary meeting which has been held in our neighborhood; and I dare say that my Phœbe remembers to this day the very severe chastisement which I felt obliged to bestow upon her, at nine years old, for ridiculing a pious and worthy man who had delivered a most interesting lecture, but whose red cotton pocket-handkerchief was full of holes. I do not suppose that you would imply that I am deficient in tenderness?"

"Lor, my dear, of course not," said Mrs. Turner; and it may be feared, from the exclamation, that though in a worldly sense she might be good-hearted, she was not up to the Bulliman mark. "But there are pleasanter things to tell children than about other children having their legs chopped off, poor dears! I hope it isn't true."

This most objectionable sentiment drew a volley of surprise from all corners.

"You wish to believe, my dear Mrs. Turner, that Mr. Yotes stood up before us and told deliberate falsehoods?" said Phœbe Bulliman, who perhaps thought that as her own early sin had been laid bare in the sight of the meeting she was entitled to go in for a little self-assertion.

"Well," said Mrs. Turner, laughing, "I should much prefer that one man told some fibs to interest us than that all those poor little children had been put to a cruel death. He said that it was a good while ago, and we know that it must have been a long way off. Let us hope that it isn't true."

"Without meaning any offense, dear Mrs. Turner," said the hostess, "I speak as a Christian mother, and but that I know the principles of my own girls are too well rooted and grounded to be shaken, I really could not allow them to remain in the room."

"*My* leaving it seems the proper course," said Mrs. Turner, "if good manners are forgotten for the sake of an itinerant lecturer with no lobes to his ears. I hope the collection was about twopence half-penny over what I was foolish enough to give, and I wish you all a very good-evening."

And she left the room; and Mrs. Bulliman noticed that Fanny Buxton rose and opened the door for her. Perhaps two or three others in that meeting were privately on the side of the warm-hearted Mrs. Turner, though her want of meekness was reprehensible, and her reference to Mr. Yotes's want of lobes scarcely bore upon the argument.

"An eminent divine has said that temper is nine-tenths of Christianity," said Mrs. Gilbert, but whether she was hitting at the departed lady or the lady of the house no one could tell. The latter had been too much astonished, at such a sudden plucking up of spirit on the part of a very good-natured little woman, to be ready with a comment, and now was justly offended that any one else should take the duty out of her hands.

"The rudeness is to *me*. If you please, we will say no more about it. But perhaps, Fanny, you will quite close the door you seemed so glad to have the honor of opening."

Fanny Buxton obeyed, and made no reply; but it is to be feared that the young lady, while she felt that it was not exactly her place to give fight, privately despised the matronhood for their tameness, and thought that if she were only a married girl—but that thought treacherously led her away to fresh fields and pastures new. And when she got back to Dorcas another topic was in hand.

"His exact expression," Phœbe was saying. "I am accustomed to take notice of words, and I wrote his down when we got home."

"Are we not making rather too much of what was perhaps only a very foolish joke?" said Mrs. Fanshaw, a lady-like person, who had not cared to interfere in the scene with Mrs. Turner, but who was inclined in her mild way to discourage the Inquisition.

"Edward Grafton is not in the habit of joking," said Sophia Bulliman; and it was true as regarded herself, and she had been aggrieved at the young clergyman's amiable indisposition to favor her own rather grim witticisms.

"Repeat, dear Phœbe," said her mother, "the lines of Cowper on the subject of a clergyman who is given to jesting."

The well-drilled Phœbe was ready at call, and recited, with very good emphasis:

"Direct me to a quip,
Or merry turn in all Paul ever wrote,
And I consent you take it for your text,
Your only one till sides and benches fail.
No, he was serious in a serious cause."

"Well remembered, dear child," said Mrs. Fanshaw, kindly, to Phœbe, who was about a foot taller than herself, and who looked years older than the fair little matron. "But I do not think that there is much in common between Mr. Edward Grafton and Saint Paul." She used the word saint with distinctness, as it was not much in use with the Bulliman section of the church.

"I should say not," said Mrs. Cutcheon, "if Edward Grafton speaks in that way of missionaries."

"A Home Mission might not be altogether out of place at Saxbury," said Miss Sophia, and her wit was received with smiles in several quarters.

"It becomes a question," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "whether dear Mrs. Bulliman is not called upon to take some serious notice of such a speech. It can not be looked at as the mere flippancy of a young man; flippancy is not Mr. Grafton's habit; and it was addressed to a lady whose views were well known to him. Setting aside the wickedness, I think the offensiveness of the remark was excessive, and if it is not uncharitable to say so, I believe it was not made without a reason."

"I have no false charity, I hope," said Mrs. Cutcheon.

"Nor much true," thought that naughty little Fanny Buxton; but, of course, held her peace.

"And," continued the lady, "I can not set aside the wickedness, which seems to me the gravest part of the offense. I have never heard any thing so shocking in all my life. To think that such a man has the care of human souls, and will one day succeed to the Rectory."

"We are not so certain about that," said Mrs. Mainwaring.

Several ladies looked up from their work, but three or four kept at it steadily, having some inkling of what might be coming out, but not being desirous to be compromised in the spread of scandal. There was good listening going on just then in Dorcas.

"The Rectory is old Mr. Grafton's own," said Mrs. Gilbert, safe as usual.

"At present," said Mrs. Mainwaring, closing her lips tightly. For she had now gone as far as she meant to go unless somebody else went with her. In provincial society it is necessary to be guarded; in London we have no scruple about alienating friends, because a fresh supply is always ready in the next drawing-room we visit.

"I am aware of your meaning," said Mrs. Bulliman, who could afford to despise politic considerations. "But I have reason to think that you are mistaken. You once hinted something of the kind, and I inquired of Mr. Bulliman, who was solicitor to Mr. Grafton, and knows his affairs. There is no ground for your belief."

"I did not know that I had expressed any," said Mrs. Mainwaring, by no means pleased that the entire charge, whatever it was, should be fastened upon herself. "I merely said—and I wish notice to be taken that I merely said—that we could not be certain of young Mr. Grafton's succession, though the Rectory is his father's."

"We can be certain of nothing in this world," said Mrs. Cutcheon; "but I do not suppose that was what Mrs. Mainwaring meant."

"Mrs. Mainwaring has too much Christian courage to shelter herself under a subterfuge," said Mrs. Bulliman. But this lady had worldly wisdom, and knew which of her subjects she could safely oppress. Mrs. Mainwaring was not one of them; she was rich, and could therefore, as we have seen, afford to be stingy, and she knew an archdeacon and some of the neighboring gentry. Mrs. Bulliman, having asserted her prerogative, extended clemency, and added:

"It had been rumored that old Mr. Grafton was in debt. I am informed by Mr. Bulliman that such is not the case, and therefore Mrs. Cutcheon is right in her sad surmise that a person like Edward may one day take upon himself the charge of poor Saxbury. Let us hope that before that time comes he may be awakened."

"And although a solicitor is proverbially cautious, and I believe is forbidden to tell any thing of a client's business," said Mrs. Gilbert, "we may be sure that he would answer frankly to his wife." A remark which, of course, while highly complimentary, apprised the meeting that in all probability Mr. Bulliman had done nothing of the kind. Which his wife perfectly understood, and said:

"I presume that when I make a statement on authority, you will believe that I know what I am talking about. And let the future be what it may, Edward Grafton is now the curate at Saxbury, and officiates regularly. I am sorry to say that another painful thing has come to me in regard to that young man; but this, of

course, must not be repeated out of this room." And she looked at Fanny Buxton, not that Mrs. Bulliman thought Fanny more likely to be garrulous than any body else, but because she was still under martial law, and was to be reminded of the fact.

"A person whom I do not mean to name, but a serious person, was in Saxbury church at the last evening lecture, which was on the evening of the day when we met young Grafton. The mode in which he read the service, and above all the way in which he preached, showed that he was laboring under excitement."

The slang in Dorcas is not that of the Octagon club, but it is just as well understood, and there was sensation.

"That is not new," said Mrs. Cutcheon. "He had that fatal tendency at college, and some of us know what occurred once—at least we know only of one occurrence—at Mrs. Conway's, although for reasons which are perfectly comprehensible, she made a great mystery of it, and I fear went so far as to deny it upon one occasion." And again that unfortunate Fanny Buxton was looked at by a severe matron. There was good spirit in that little maiden.

"Mrs. Cutcheon looks at me as if I ought to speak," said Fanny, "because she means, I suppose, that the denial took place in my hearing. I quite remember what was said, and that Mrs. Conway only checked what was a very impertinent inquiry." And Fanny, in her turn, looked antagonistic, for she adored Mrs. Conway, who had once helped her, in the nicest way, out of a girl's indiscretion, and given her such a kind and hearty scolding as had endeared her to Fanny for life. Nobody felt inclined to venture upon Mrs. Conway's pretty little champion just then.

Mrs. Bulliman was not unjust.

"If you mean by Mrs. Conway's reasons," she said, "that she had any thought of Edward Grafton and Magdalen, there is nothing in it. They never would hear of him. That is certain, I assure you, Mrs. Cutcheon."

"I am glad to hear it, for Miss Conway's sake."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "the best construction we can put upon his wicked speech to Mrs. Bulliman is that the same cause was in operation."

"It was early in the afternoon," said Phœbe.

"There was nothing of the kind," said Sophia.

"He spoke quite collectedly about Mr. Yotes's lecture."

"And explained that he had not known of it."

"And inquired who Mr. Yotes was."

"And mentioned the exact hour of dinner at the Rectory."

"And his father's reluctance to alter it."

So, in alternate strains, testified the Misses Bulliman. How delightful to be a young clergyman, whose smallest words are caught up and remembered, to jot and tittle, by young ladies, even if they be externally hard-favored.

"And the evening lecture is always before dinner," said Mrs. Fanshaw.

"I am sorry to say that there are other places besides his father's dining-room," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "where Edward might indulge his unhappy habit, for I fear we must call it so, and that those places are known to Mr. Grafton is also too certain. He very frequently visits the Salvington Arms."

"He has a horse there," said Fanny Buxton, "and it is there because it is ill, and Saxbury is too far for Mr. Enery, the veterinary surgeon, to see it so often there as Mr. Grafton wishes."

"You seem very well informed about this poor young man's affairs, Miss Buxton," said Mrs. Mainwaring.

"I heard this from my brother," said Fanny, gently.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Cutcheon, "a horse is a very good excuse for a visit to a tavern."

Fanny knew, but did not like to say, that the Salvington Arms was not a tavern, but a most respectable hotel, and also that the stabling was a long way from the house, and was approached by a separate entrance. She had been taken there by her brother to see a wonderful spotted pony belonging to a traveling circus, but, worldly little creature as she was, she knew better than to bring a circus pony into Dorcas.

"Old Mr. Grafton was never suspected of that sin," said Mrs. Gilbert, for a second just departing a shade from her colorless delivery to put a little force in her last word but one.

"No," said Mrs. Bulliman, "never. Another sin would cast that out, his wicked pride, though, speaking in a worldly sense, it is hard to say what he has to be proud of."

"Not his sermons," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "for he does not preach twenty times from Christmas to Christmas, and when he does I am told that his discourses are evidently out of some old book."

"Not of the state of his parish," said Mrs. Cutcheon; "for to say nothing of spiritual blindness, the morals of Saxbury—however, as there are young persons here we need not go into that—but we judge the shepherd by the sheep."

"Nor of his son and destined successor," said Mrs. Bulliman; "and how dreadful must be the responsibility of a parent who has brought up a son in that manner, and, with what is before his eyes, intends to commit a parish to the charge of such a young man."

"I do not believe Edward Grafton to be utterly bad at heart," said Phœbe. "I need not say, I hope, that I know we all are that, but I mean in the ordinary sense, and I think that if he were providentially directed in marriage he might be reclaimed."

It was no secret to two or three of grim Phœbe's friends that it was not her fault that Edward had never deciphered her name on the direction in question, but having renounced hope, she could yet speak without bitterness. There is some good in all of us.

"Phœbe," said Mrs. Bulliman, "you have

been too well taught in serious things to countenance the doctrine that a Christian woman may run the fearful risk of marriage with one who is no Christian in the hope of converting him; but as all our friends do not know you so well as your parents, it is right for you to observe that you spoke only in the language of the world."

"Certainly, mamma," said Phœbe, rather sulkily. She had intended to be magnanimous, and suddenly found herself receiving, morally, one of the whippings of which, physically, she had in early life not been without experience. And she saw Fanny Buxton's eyes twinkle—they had a way of twinkling, and it was very pleasant to behold, if she happened to be pleased with the person at whom the phenomenon was exhibited. Phœbe, however, did not like it, but could hardly make it the subject of remonstrance.

"And speaking of Mrs. Conway," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "it is sad that what she can see in one person she is blind to in the case of another. I am sure I hope that this marriage of Magdalen's will be happy, but it is made in the face of every kind of warning."

"The intended bridegroom is of the world, worldly," said Mrs. Bulliman, "and saying that, enough is said. But merely in that point of view, I believe that the match is what is called a good one, and perhaps Mrs. Conway will not be sorry to get such a girl settled, and to be released from the trying responsibility which her mother must now suffer. I am afraid, however, to trust myself to think of the future that is in store for Magdalen Conway."

"She is one of the sweetest girls in the world," exclaimed Fanny Buxton, "and she deserves the best husband ever created."

"You mean, Miss Buxton, that she is apparently good-tempered. I assure you that you will some day bitterly regret the habit of speaking with unguardedness and exaggeration. Do let me beg of you to subdue an impetuous spirit, too, too sadly in need of correction. I see that I anger you, my dear, but that only convinces me the more that it is my duty to caution you as I should do one of my own children."

"I assure you, Mrs. Bulliman, that you do not know what a good girl Magdalen Conway is, and I do."

"You must not speak so to me, my dear Fanny," said Mrs. Bulliman, with calm dignity. "I do not disapprove of your zeal for one whom you consider your friend, though I wish that you selected friends more likely to do you good for this world and the next. But let me ask you—or rather do you ask yourself—whether it is consistent with the truth which you have been taught, to profess such admiration for a young person without any religious principles, who has scarcely escaped, if she has escaped, the contamination of the Roman Catholic church?"

Fanny Buxton received this adjuration with composure, but thought it best to abstain from any direct reply.

"I think," she said, rising, "that I could make you believe better things of Magdalen, but we will have a quiet talk all to ourselves some day. I promised mamma that I would be home early, so I will say good-evening."

But the little rebel said something very unlike good-evening as she went into the bedroom to put on her bonnet, and she did not give at all a respectful look at the hard portrait of her hostess which hung over a shelf of works issued by the Religious Tract Society.

"I am sorry Mrs. Buxton permits that intimacy," said the original of the portrait. "I have remonstrated in vain. But I hoped that by coming among us Fanny might gradually be weaned from the association. Do you try to see as much of her as you can, my dear girls?"

"I am sure I did, mamma," said Sophia, "but her unwillingness to be much with us was so marked that it was useless to persevere."

"It was not my intention to mention it," said Phœbe, "but finding that she would not listen, I wrote her several long letters of affectionate advice to seek other friendships."

"We have done our duty," said Mrs. Bulliman, "and we can only hope. The marriage will remove Magdalen Conway from Naybury, and the evil will therefore be checked to a great extent."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Cutcheon. "The young couple are to live with the parents. I know that, for Willis has prepared a plan for some alterations in the house, and as he is no great draughtsman he got Ebenezer Smith to make the drawings. Ebenezer, you know, lodges with one of my husband's clerks, who told my son Robert."

"I did not know that," said Mrs. Mainwaring; "but it is just like the Conways, who make an idol of their daughter, and deny themselves the gratification of no whim. One would have thought that they knew how such arrangements always end."

"But," said Mrs. Bulliman, who would not pretend to have known what really was news to her, "it does not prove that because alterations are made in the house, they are for the sake of Magdalen and Mr. Dormer."

"I assure you," said Mrs. Cutcheon, "that it is as I tell you. The new rooms are marked in the plan with the names of the Dormers, and Robert repeated with a boy's delight a foolish joke of Mr. Conway's, who had insisted on calling the bedroom the Dormertory."

"Well, I am sorry to hear it. In a Christian family, of course, relatives might gather in a spirit that would prevent what we are too sure must happen at the Conways. Mr. Dormer I have seen. We met at one of the cottages of my poor, where Miss Conway thinks it proper and respectful to me to visit also, although she was offered an allotment of paupers whom she could have visited without interfering with any one."

"I hope that she does not give them Popish tracts," said Mrs. Cutcheon.

"If I could trace such an act to her," said

Mrs. Bulliman, "my course would be very plain, but I learn from the poor, whom I have severely questioned, that she never talks to them on religion at all. That is sad enough, but it is better than her doing active mischief. I was saying, however, that I met Mr. Dormer, and Miss Conway could not help introducing us. His manners are what is called very agreeable, that is, of course, he does not care sufficiently about any thing to be in earnest, and he made some very light-minded remarks about the business I was engaged in. He is not the kind of person who will submit to the rule of a mother-in-law."

"Besides," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "what is the use of the Conways giving out that the man is rich, and then taking him into their house? Does a rich man, with a position, accept lodgings in that way? Depend upon it we shall hear the true story one of these days, and find that the Conways have been imposed upon by a penniless adventurer."

"I do not think that Mrs. Conway is a person to be imposed upon, do you, Mrs. Cutcheon?" said Mrs. Fanshaw, very sweetly. It would be harsh to suppose that she addressed that lady except accidentally, or that mild Mrs. Fanshaw remembered a little story about some hay which Mr. Cutcheon had sought to obtain at a very low price from the Londoners, and had not succeeded, owing to the shrewdness of Mary Conway. The story had rather pleased Naybury, whose rate-payers had once or twice had to smart in consequence of some Cutcheon cleverness.

"I know very little about her, Mrs. Fanshaw, and I am not very anxious to improve our acquaintance," was the tart reply. "I am not one of those who are ready to run into the arms of every new-comer."

Now Mrs. Fanshaw was popular, and though sufficiently of a Christian to be allowed to attend the Dorcas meetings, had, not so very long ago, lived in London society, and still preserved the London habit of easily thawing to new acquaintances. Mrs. Cutcheon demanded a great deal of information about people before she would venture to discuss with them at all freely the probability of fine weather, and the character of a view from a window. Pretty Mrs. Fanshaw had been seen, wooed, and wed—and wed to a very good fellow—in less time than Mrs. Cutcheon had taken to inquire into the vices of the last house-maid she had engaged, and who, by-the-way, let in a lover and another burglar, to the detriment of the Cutcheon plate-chest.

"You would like Mrs. Conway if she would allow you to know her," said Mrs. Fanshaw, smiling down the other's rudeness and then explaining away her own. "I mean if you became intimate enough really to know her, of course."

And Mrs. Bulliman knew better than to do more than turn a deaf ear to the remark. It will be seen that though a despot, her despotism, like that of Louis XIV., was tempered by epigrams.

"We were speaking on another subject," she said, "and I suppose that I ought to mention to dear friends what I thought of doing, not that I wish any one to be responsible for what I do, or to consider herself mixed up in it, if more afraid than any one ought to be of giving offense to man. I think Edward Grafton's language to me was so awful in itself, and so much more awful coming from a Christian minister, that it is my duty to set his sin before his eyes, and possibly before the eyes of his father and mother. I shall therefore go over to Saxbury, and I hope I may be able to report that he has given signs of repentance. If he does not give these, painful as it may be, I shall not shrink from an interview with the Bishop."

If that right reverend and most kind-hearted and amiable prelate had only known what was in store for him, his lordship would at once have decided on the Continental tour to which his wife and daughters were affectionately urging him, but the Anglican hierarch (with an exception or two) is unfortunately without supernatural powers.

Whatever check the head of the Dorcas Association might have encountered in the course of the sitting was now forgotten. In this daring undertaking the society recognized the spirit of its head, and from nearly all her friends—Mrs. Fanshaw was not observed to join—Mrs. Bulliman received the assurance that she was about to take the right line, and according to their natures the Dorcasians in their little speeches appealed more or less freely to a certain influence by which all human actions should be guided, but to which it is not so necessary to make more reference here than will show upon what high grounds Edward Grafton was to be taken to task for wishing that all missionaries were eaten. Be it added, in justice to the Dorcas Association, that while all this discussion proceeded, the needles went hard and fast for the benefit of the legitimate babies of Naybury pauperism, and in justice to Mrs. Bulliman, that she did not allow the party to separate until all had partaken of a nice little early supper, prefaced by grace from Phœbe, and ended by grace from Sophia. The House of Commons, to which we tremblingly likened—or refused to liken, the house of Dorcas, is only half as mindful of its religious duties.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RECTORY.

While such preparation was being made for the assault upon the Rectory, the menaced persons were seated at the well-served table of the Reverend Theodore Grafton.

The head of the household was a clergyman of imposing presence. It has been said by those who loved him not that he was proud, but it would have been difficult for a man so constructed to have avoided the appearance of pride.

Tall, large, strong, but not with clumsy strength, the Rector of Saxbury had been in youth one of the most splendid fellows at Oxford, and in advanced age he was the model of what a bishop should be in days when the Church demands princes of the fighting sort. He had a fine head, and very masculine features, upon which, though not often, a frown very much akin to a scowl would gather, at which times it was best for the chidden to be silent, except when commanded to excuse themselves. The hair was well-preserved, but streaked with gray, almost the only sign of advancing age, for the eyes were full of light, and though the lines about the mouth had deepened, that effect seemed to have resulted from a habit of setting the face hard, and the bold forehead was unwrinkled. Mr. Grafton's hands were white but powerful, and they had done work in field and on river, and perhaps in fray, when he was at college. The Rector's voice was exceedingly good, and had been cultivated, and it was a voice which, in the old days, would have rang out proud defiance to king or mob, or would have nobly led the vows of a pious army before the slaughter of the heathen. But it was subdued and modulated in society, with perhaps more art than should be detected, though the effect was so agreeable that one could not quarrel with the means. Mr. Grafton never appeared to be speaking more loudly than others, but at the most hilarious feast he had but to speak to be heard, and one seemed the better for having listened to the notes of that fine organ. His courtesy was great, and what would in most men have been deemed somewhat too studied, but it had become a habit with the Rector. His deference to women charmed them, for it was not the mock homage which implies their helplessness of intellect, but the respectful attention which they used to receive from the old school—a very good school in more respects than the new will allow while muttering its indiscretions to fast young ladies. The Rector, in brief, looked a man who had got himself very well in hand, it might be for a special purpose, but who was quite capable of letting himself go, on provocation, and then, perhaps, might go over all and sundry who got in his way.

The party, in addition to the Rector, consisted of Mrs. Grafton, the curate, and Mr. Abbott, a lawyer, whose business was chiefly clerical, and who had come over from the cathedral town, where he had been discharging the duties of a pleasant and lucrative office connected with the church and her dowry. He lived in London. Mr. Abbott was a good-looking, gentlemanly man, of middle age, full of information of all kinds, and excessively genial, as it hath been observed that attorneys who have dealings with the clergy usually become, a fact in zoology which has not been satisfactorily explained.

Mrs. Grafton had been a beauty, but of the type which fades very soon, unless the wearer be very prosperous and content, or have a very cold nature which defies trouble and sorrow. Neither of these conditions existed in the case of Mrs. Grafton, who had suffered, and whose delicate features had lost all their charm except that of gentleness. But she did not play the martyr. Had she wished to do so, it would have been hard work to sustain any continuous melancholy in the presence of the Rector, who would not, probably, have been very tolerant of skeletons at his table or hearth. But Mrs. Grafton had taken her troubles like a good woman, and was always ready to acknowledge the comforts by which they had been in some sort balanced. If she were an unappreciated woman—most women have a harmless trick of believing that they are not quite understood, and the belief is strongest in the simplest of them—Mrs. Grafton never told any body that it was so. That she was not a happy woman any person could discover who saw her when she imagined herself unobserved; but in society she was kindly, and reasonably cheerful. Whether she loved as much as she must have admired her splendid husband might be matter of opinion; but no one who saw her looks at Edward Grafton, or caught the motherly undertone of confidence and affection, could doubt her adoration for the young curate of Saxbury.

The entire party seemed on very good terms, and the Rector was just recommending to the notice of the London lawyer some exceedingly fine port, with which the gentleman had, on previous occasions, made fortunate acquaintance.

"Edward passes the bottle, Abbott, and awaits the revolution of the claret-jug; but you and I know better things."

"But he is quite right," said Mr. Abbott, laughing pleasantly—he had a cheery laugh, not at all like the noises emitted by some of his profession, and which seem echoes of the grunts of their clients over unrighteous bills. "Quite right, Mr. Grafton. He knows that there will be no port in a few years, except here and there a bottle for a Rothschild or an American who has struck oil. So he is not training himself to a luxury which will be forbidden to the *post nati*."

"You remind me of Blackstone, my dear Abbott," said the Rector—a reading man—"if you do not consider that a bad compliment. He gives the most admirable reasons for the most absurd things in law and the constitution. Not, my dear Edward," he added, courteously, to his son, "that your preferring claret to port is absurd, of course. But I think you will admit that our friend has provided you with a reason not strictly within your purview."

"I shall use it, in future, though," said Edward; "it sounds so much better than the real one."

"*Fumus gloria mundi*, perhaps," said the lawyer, "with Sir Bulwer Lytton's gloss on the saying?"

"That is it," said his father. "I never smoked in my life, but each age has its own manners, or want of manners."

Mr. Abbott's look could not be understood by Edward Grafton—but his mother had a glimpse of its meaning, and the Rector looked straight before him and at his wife. Inside his mind Mr. Abbott said:

"Why before *us*?"

But we do not say every thing that we think, or the Last Man would very soon be called upon for his immortal address to the Sun, and Mr. Abbott replied:

"I smoke sometimes, and the Bishop of Pembridge smokes every day. But I do not know that it is worth while acquiring the habit when one has done without it so long as you have done, Mr. Grafton."

Mr. Abbott considered the last words due to himself, and then he praised the Rector's port.

"I wish you would take a glass or two, dear," said Mrs. Grafton to Edward. "I do not think you are at all well."

"I am all right, my dear mother."

"Rebecca told me to-day that she was sure you were ill. She was at church on Wednesday night, and at one time she thought that you were going to faint."

"Dear old thing! All nonsense. I remember, I had walked a good deal that day, and eaten little or nothing, and I dare say that I seemed tired. That was all, and, please, I will keep to the claret."

"Rebecca's report is not exactly confirmed by that of Mr. Blaby," said the Rector. "He told me to-day, when he came in with the books, that since he has been clerk he never heard the old roof ring as Mr. Edward made it ring that night. I thought that I had tried the rafters reasonably well in my time, but Edward delivered himself, I am told, like Boanerges, the son of thunder. I trust, my dear fellow, that you were only trying some acoustic experiment, and that you have not been taking a lesson from our friend at Jehovah-Jireh—as they have profanely christened a meeting-house here, Abbott."

"Your son takes an oratorical lesson from nobody but his father," said Edward Grafton, with not an ungraceful imitation of the Rector's style of old world compliment. The mother's pale cheek colored with pleasure, and the Rector himself smiled.

"*Non sum qualis eram*," he said, "but I have shouted in my time. Did it ever occur to you, Abbott, that the ancients must have had fine notions of the power of the human voice in exciting terror? Of course you remember how Achilles, when he could not fight because his armor was not ready, came to the front, and helped his party by simply bellowing."

"Of course," said Mr. Abbott, who had an excellent memory. "I think I could give you the Greek, but as Mrs. Grafton is here, that shall excuse English.

"'Thrice from the trench his dreadful voice he raised,
And thrice they fled, confounded and amazed.'"

"Yes," said the Rector. "We accept that from Homer, and it is a tremendous incident in the fight he describes. But suppose that a field-officer had rushed out of his tent in the Crimea, and shouted three times at the Russians."

"I think he would have had an early suggestion to attend to urgent private affairs, and his friends would have received a telegram recommending them to 'take care of Stentor.'"

"Yet we are made on the same principle as the Greeks, I suppose. But taking the shout of Achilles for a flight of poetry, remember what stress is laid on the terrible voices of champions, classical and medieval. Have we lost the art of frightening?"

Whatever color there had been on Mrs. Grafton's cheek was now gone, and her habitual pallor was visibly increased.

"*You* are not well, mother," said Edward. "Let me take you into the drawing-room."

"No, dear," she said, faintly, "I would rather be here, than—than alone. Give me a little wine," she added, smiling, "a very little."

"Fill your dear mother's glass," said the Rector. "No, full," he added, with emphasis. "It will do her good, I doubt not. Again, Abbott, you attend the play-houses, I know. I have not visited one of them since the days of the Kembles, but you can tell me whether there is any voice on the stage that terrifies you."

"There are several that terrify me from going into the theatre," said the lawyer, laughing; "but there is no such organ as you mean. Nor, while I think of it, is the passion of terror appealed to as it might be, and as it used to be in the days of the Greeks."

"You could not have that passion," said Edward. "The people believed in the Furies and the other horrors, and you struck at once on the chord of superstition. I suspect that the pit at Covent Garden would laugh at any Bogey that spoke seriously. There is always a giggle when the ghosts pop up in the Macbeth caldron."

"That is because managers, like Bourbons, forget nothing and learn nothing," said Abbott. "I believe that with the resources of modern machinery, and especially with the aid of chemistry, I could myself devise something that would send half the house into fits."

"And the children," murmured Mrs. Grafton, in a low voice.

"Well, my dear Mrs. Grafton, you are quite right. It would be a wicked and brutal thing to do, unless one excluded the children, and announced strong meat for men only. But I think that somebody will make a fortune out of the artistic Dreadful, when the vulgar Horrible shall be reconsigned to the thieves and cads across the Thames, from whose entertainments we borrowed it. But, talking of horrors, Mr. Grafton," continued the fluent lawyer, "you spoke of Dissenters, just now, and a chapel. Are you much troubled with those intruders?"

"Not very much, considering that my respected predecessor did so much to encourage them."

"Did he? I forget."

"Did he not? Why, Sir, there was only that one bit of ground in the parish on which it was possible for a schismatic to build. All the rest was in the hands of men who would as soon have leased their land to a professional poacher. But this bit belonged to an old maiden lady who was a friend of my sapient predecessor, and who actually consulted him when the fellows came to her to ask for the ground."

"And he told her to give it?"

"Not exactly in those words; but instead of using his influence, and beating such stuff out of her head, I believe he told her that he could not recommend her to do other than pray to be guided aright, and so forth. Imagine the telling a foolish old woman to go and pray for advice. Of course she improved on his hint, and called in the brethren to drink their tea and eat their greasy toast in her house, and to direct her devotions, and of course we know what that would come to. There they are, planted."

"Odd, too," said Abbott. "I thought that Mr.—what was his name—Moorhead, wasn't it?—yes—I thought that he was a very zealous churchman."

"Now," thought Edward, "let us hear the Rector's definition." The younger Grafton had taken no share in the anti-schismatic dialogue.

"He was zealous enough in his way," said the Reverend Theodore Grafton, "but he was not a churchman, nor was he a gentleman."

"You mean that no true churchman would have helped in these Dissenters?"

"I would be just, Abbott," said the Rector looking very judicial and majestic. "I have no sympathy with a certain class among the clergy, and I think that they take such low ground as proves them unaware of the true foundations of the Church, which is based upon a lofty rock, and not down in a methodistical morass. But I allow that they are sometimes men whose zeal, if not their judgment, is to be respected. It is possible that a good man may justify to his own weak mind the infusion of dissent into his parish. But Mr. Moorhead knew who was to succeed him, and he deliberately established that evening lecture, and assisted the Dissenters to their chapel, because he knew my views, and desired to counteract them. There, Sir, was no gentleman."

"Then," said Abbott, who was not in the least afraid of any body in the world, "you will not give him the benefit of the doubt whether he did not think it his duty to propagate Evangelicalism, which he knew would find no favor from you?"

The Rector's brow darkened, and he wheeled himself, as it were, head and body together, as if he were a great gun turning into position in order to sweep every thing away with one tremendous explosion. But when he found himself confronted by the merry eyes of the lawyer, who was rather amused at the ire which he knew was stirring in the celestial bosom, the same wisdom which had guided the high priestess of Dorcas, when her spiritual power was challenged, came to the aid of the high priest of Saxbury. He somewhat loftily, yet adroitly, turned his thunder into a compliment, and said:

"Mr. Abbott, your own sense of gentlemanly conduct is so high that you are unable to comprehend the vulgarity of the man's conduct. We will not pursue a disagreeable subject. Pray help yourself."

At this moment Edward Grafton's mind was disturbed by a course of sensations for which as yet he will have received little credit. He had certain impressions, if they did not amount to convictions, as to the great responsibility of the Christian priest in regard to doctrine and to example. And however imperfectly he understood the case, and however readily he allowed himself to neglect that class of ideas, he held a faith, and he believed that his father had none. When, therefore, he heard the Rector sonorously enunciating the superiority of certain conventional rules, called gentlemanly behavior, over the dictates of conscience and of fidelity to awful vows, it was Edward Grafton's instinct to enter his protest, as a priest of the same Church as his father, against being supposed to hold that worldly creed.

But he was silent. He felt unequal to face any kind of storm at that time. He was troubled with other matters. His heart was in another place. And he satisfied himself with a *cui bono*. His mother knew his views. He did not care whether his father knew them or not. And was it necessary to parade one's theological principles in order to set one's self right in the eyes of a London lawyer, a man of the world, who probably had that extraordinary tolerance which men learn in society for every kind of opinion which does not break out in bad taste or lead its owner over your own corns? Therefore he held his tongue, but mentally protested against the sentiments of his father.

His mother saw, or fancied that she saw, on his face some indication that he might be tempted into controversial assertion of his own ideas, and she instantly roused herself (with one of those exertions of which loving women make a hundred for one that is recognized and thanked by those for whose sake they are made), and entered into the conversation.

"Mr. Grafton has often thought," she said, "of putting an end to that evening lecture. It is scantily attended, and it causes us a good deal of inconvenience."

"We should hear of it in Naybury if it were discontinued," said Edward.

"That consideration would not have much weight with me, Edward, as I think you know," said the Rector.

"It would have some with me," said Edward; "for if we could feel justified in the alteration I am ashamed to say that I should feel a very considerable pleasure in it, as a kind of defiance to a clique at Naybury which arrogates to itself inquistorial powers, and of which a Londoner can have little idea."

"A sort of Vigilance Committee, eh?" said

Mr. Abbott. "Oh yes, I know a deal about such folks. There was a junta of the same kind in the town that Mrs. Abbott came from, and I flatter myself that I had the honor of exploding it by bringing an action for defamation against one of the members for words spoken by his wife. It was very hard upon him, but the example told, and we smashed the amateur convocation."

"Then there must have been traitors in the camp," said Mrs. Grafton. "How did you get witnesses?"

"We managed it, Mrs. Grafton. I must not say too much, but Mrs. Abbott's knowledge of all the people, and especially of the hopes and fears of certain marriageable young ladies, came into play in the happiest manner. We did not go into court, but we got an apology, and a gift to a hospital, and something rather pretty in the way of costs,"

"We must talk to Mrs. Abbott when you bring her down, which I hope you will soon do," said Mrs. Grafton, "and she must instruct us in her way of taming these dreadful dragons."

"If I were not speaking of ladies, however unworthy of that name, my dear, I should be inclined to substitute the word cats for dragons," said the Rector. "They meet at one another's houses, Abbott, under pretense of making clothes for the poor (of which I dare say they make very few, and which they had better buy of the local tradesmen), and they take the conduct of the clergy and other leading people into consideration, and pass verdicts."

"Have you had the honor of being dissected."

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Grafton. "We are very unfavorably looked upon."

"I hope so," said the Rector, "though really it is almost unworthy of us to be aware of the impertinence."

"Ah, then they do not issue a mandamus, and call upon offenders to answer for their practices?"

"I am half inclined to say with Edward that I should like to come into actual collision with them. But I do not think that they have the courage to risk that. We have been here a long time, and though in an indirect way they have ventured to let it come round, as by accident, to the ears of Mrs. Grafton, that this parish is not managed in the way they approve, they have not dared to communicate with me. I own I wish that some of them would pluck up the spirit to come and beard me."

"I dare say that they would hear something to their advantage," laughed the lawyer. "The worst of it is, that we must not be rude to a female deputation."

"Be assured that I meditate no rudeness. But I think that the first deputation would be the last."

"Then," said Mrs. Grafton, "I may as well tell you something, Theodore, which I heard this afternoon only, and I could not mention sooner, as you have been out with Mr. Abbott. Edward, my dear, I think that you have brought the storm down upon us at last."

"I, my dear mother!"

"Yes, you seem to have been charmingly unguarded in some remarks which you ventured to make to Mrs. Bulliman, and a lady, who begs that I will only mention her as a little bird, has hinted to me that your conduct was to be taken into consideration at a Dorcas meeting this evening. Do your ears tingle? Perhaps the ladies are scolding you at this very instant."

"Why, Edward," said his father, smiling, "what direful deed have you done? I thought that you and that lady were such good friends, and I have not been without fear that you might some morning ask me whether I should object to an evangelical Gorgon for a daughter-in-law."

"You have put an idea into my head," said Edward, "and of course it shall have due consideration. But, mother dear, what on earth have I done to blast my prospects of happiness?"

"Did you not meet Mrs. Bulliman and her charming daughters the other day, that is to say, Wednesday? Come, Edward, no love-secrets from your mother."

"It is too true, mother."

"Well, you know best what you said, for my little bird would not tell me. Only it was something very awful."

"I have no recollection of any thing beyond some chatter about some lecturer. I was in a great hurry. I did my best to get away from the Bullimans."

"That was natural. I really can not blame that," said his father.

"I have told you all I know," said his mother, "so you had better be prepared for the worst. Perhaps Miss Phœbe or Miss Sophia —you know best which—will speak in your defense."

"I think I had better telegraph for Mrs. Abbott," said the lawyer. "It is evidently time to bestir ourselves. And Edward's evident innocence is the worst feature in the case, for he will be convicted to a certainty."

The younger clergyman sat silent, trying with all his might to recollect what had passed, but he could get at nothing except a general impression that the Bullimans, whom he hated, had stopped him in the street near Chervil, the chemist's, and that he had escaped as soon as he could from talk about missionaries.

"Stop!" he said. "One of those girls was to write to me about something. Which was it —what was it?"

"Don't look at me so accusingly, Edward dear. I assure you that I have intercepted no letters," said his mother, laughing.

"This begins to be serious, my son," said the doctor, with affected solemnity. "I hope not to learn that you have been playing with the feelings of a Gorgon, but when she proceeds to threaten correspondence parents become anxious."

"I am innocent," said Edward Grafton. "Time will prove it. Meantime, unless the storm you speak of bursts, mother, I must live under suspicion."

"Shall I go into Naybury in the morning, Edward," said Mr. Abbott, "and try whether I can learn any thing? Your father's son may command my services. Or shall we set a spy to work?"

He spoke in the idlest banter, but Edward Grafton flushed crimson.

CHAPTER XIII.

DAMON AND PYTHIAS.

Mr. Thomas Tickell's name abideth not in the memory of many, and few of the rustic moralists who, by reading homely texts strewn on tombstones, learn to die, are aware that his pen set the copy that may be read in every churchyard—the lines in which the deserted Lucy states to her weeping virgins that she saw a hand they could not see, which beckoned her away. Still fewer readers of verse know that in honor of Kensington Gardens, to which we are about to accompany some acquaintances, Mr. Tickell indited a long poem, detailing the woes of the nymph Kenna, who laid out her slaughtered lover in the form of snow-drops, which "whitened half the shade" of those gardens. The poet asserts that Kenna gave to the neighboring town its name, but cold-hearted antiquaries, who lack romance, will tolerate no etymology so graceful, and fall back upon Kœnigstown as the parent word. We hold these up to the indignation of the myriads of lovers who, like Kenna, have plann'd that Landskip in a morning dream.

"You must feel, Ernest, that this should have been done long ago," said Colonel Latrobe, as the two men paced one of the quieter walks in the Gardens. They had been talking for a long time, and very gravely.

"In one sense, yes, if it were to be done at all." He spoke the last words in a tone that might imply dissatisfaction with some resolution at which he had arrived.

"You are the only person who can judge about that," said Walter, answering the other's meaning rather than his words.

"You must see that I had no choice," returned Ernest. "That is, of course, I had the choice between the terms I have told you of and ruin."

"There are various kinds of ruin," said Latrobe, quietly, as the brave and handsome little officer generally spoke.

"What?" said Ernest Dormer, angrily. "You are not suggesting that I should have let myself go to the bad, or cleared myself in the bankruptcy court, then have gone in for the life of a well-dressed cad, tolerated by men who despised me, and revenging myself by picking them up at billiards and that sort of thing?"

"I am suggesting nothing, Ernest. It is not my business to suggest. You had, I believe about three hundred a year, which was safe?"

"Yes, and I should have had to set apart a hundred at least for creditors."

"And have had two hundred to live on?"

"Live on! Live on four pounds a week! What makes you talk such nonsense, Walter?"

"A man may live on four pounds a week without being a cad, Dormer. I know three friends who live on three pounds a week, and each has a wife, and two have children."

"But gentlemen?"

"All my friends are gentlemen, at present."

"You understand me. My dear old fellow, I have asked you to do a most disagreeable thing and you do not like it, and God knows I don't wonder at that. But do not revenge yourself by being ill-tempered with me. You can't know how I torment myself."

"Perhaps I do," said Walter Latrobe, gravely, but not with any increase of kindness in his manner. "But you say very truly that the work you ask me to do is most disagreeable—and worse. It is not so much the mere errand—such affairs have to be broken off in most cases, and women ought to expect that they will. But in this case matters on one side have advanced so much further than they ought to have done before we give the other side a hint, that I must own to you that I wish you had asked somebody else."

"You are quite certain that I am talking no lying nonsense to you, Walter, when I say that I have asked you simply because of all the men I know you are the man to do the thing in the kindest way."

"I dare say that may be so," said Walter Latrobe.

"You know it. But I do not seem to have convinced you that I have lost no time, or rather that I did not go further than I was compelled to do, before breaking off with poor Lucy. I fought for time, though I hardly know why I did, if the end were to be the same."

"That is twice, Ernest, in a few minutes, that you have implied that you did not desire such an end."

"Nor did I," said Ernest Dormer, in a low but determined tone. "I was happy enough—at least I was tolerably content, except at rare times when I got out of spirits and took to thought—and Lucy was as happy as a bird. If the thing could have gone on it should not have been broken off by me. There! It is not to another man in England that I would have said so much, and you may live to fling it in my teeth; but I have said it, and it is true." Which statement he confirmed by solemn words, said too earnestly to be written down against him as a sin.

"I am glad that Miss Conway is not my sister," said Walter Latrobe, "though I believe in my soul that you will make a good and kind husband. If I did not I would not do this for you."

The simple, honest manner of that brave young soldier, as he said this, was something to see, and something that unless it had been seen would not have been believed possible by many women who had heard him whisper things that were neither simple nor honest.

"I will behave as a gentleman, at least," said Ernest Dormer. He had promised a good deal more in the letter which we saw Magdalen Conway receive on the grass-plot at Naybury. "But, Walter," he added, earnestly, "do understand this, or you will not do me justice now, or when I may want it even more than now. I could not have gone on for another month. Every body pressed. Even the Jews began to press, and they always behave better than any other creditor, but they saw the time had come. I laid the whole facts before the Stepneys."

"Your uncle and aunt?"

"Yes," said Dormer, bitterly, "they are my uncle and aunt, no doubt. How that Mrs. Stepney came to be the sister of my mother, the best woman who ever lived, I don't know. But it is so. Well, I was treated, I suppose, as well as I could expect. That is, as I could expect from such people as the Stepneys."

"You told me that they had previously made you some considerable advances."

"Yes, they let me have a couple of thousand pounds eight or nine years ago. But every shilling that old Stepney has in the world he owes to my late father, who made him. That's nothing, you will say."

"I say no such thing, and I never knew that fact before. Now that I do know it, I suppose I get a new light in their behavior in this matter of the marriage?"

"I want no light that can make their behavior seem less detestable, and therefore do not you try to make excuses for them. They were exceedingly gracious and polite, and asked me to dinner three times while they were making up their minds how best to wound my feelings. Finally it was announced to me that they would do nothing at all, unless I married and became what they were good enough to call a respectable member of society. In that case they would not only free me from my debts, but would settle on me and my children the little estate which had been my mother's, and which old Stepney bought when our crash came."

"Fourteen hundred a year, they say at the club."

"Just like the idiotic trash you get at a club. Fourteen hundred devils! It will be about seven hundred—perhaps the odd fifty."

"And the three of your own. Come, as regards mere money, you are not so badly off."

"That three are encumbered, but my first act is to clear that, and you know whose it is forever afterward."

"I do not consider that your language about your relatives is exactly just. Decorous and religious persons, as I think you say they are, look at marriage as a duty, and of course have a right to their own view. All things considered, you are very well treated, Ernest. It is not every uncle that would restore between seven and eight hundred pounds from a recollection of the kindness of a dead brother-in-law."

"You have not heard all, or rather you have not listened."

And this was true. Thought is sometimes possessed of a mad power of self-guidance, and it rushes away with the bit of will between its teeth. Dormer had told Latrobe the rest of the story, but had previously made him aware of the service Ernest was about to ask. And so it was that while Ernest Dormer was proceeding with that detail the young soldier's thoughts had, for some inconceivable reason, flown back to that hill-fort in India, and to the slaughter of the savage heathen; and the little umbrella which Colonel Latrobe was thrusting so fiercely into the Kensington gravel was moved by a far different agency from that to which Dormer attributed his friend's behavior. Perhaps the incidents of that fierce battle-day were the most exciting which had ever marked the life of Latrobe; and perhaps it is in nature, when sorely disturbed by one subject, to seek homeopathic remedy by recurring to another period of excitement. But who knows, and who would be the better for knowing, the secret of the fantastic phenomena of such association?

"I believe that something escaped me."

"This is what you ought to bear constantly in mind. I would say nothing against the conditions, so far as—as you remember them, except for a belief which I have, and which I will tell you. But so resolved were the Stepneys to clench the nail, that though they would have saved money by paying a certain debt for me on the instant, they announced that they would pay neither that, nor any thing else, until I should come to them and state that I was engaged to be married, and could show the assent of the lady's parents or guardians."

"Well?"

"I see. You mean that they had come to doubt me, and were wise in taking precautions against my availing myself of their money and not marrying."

"Such things have been done. You would not have done so, but Mr. and Mrs. Stepney had perhaps no reason for much confidence."

"They did not doubt me," said Ernest Dormer, with some haughtiness. "I have never behaved otherwise than as a gentleman. But I believe, Walter Latrobe—yes, on my soul I believe, that the Stepneys—that is, the wife, knew all about Lucy, and my way of life, and that she makes the pecuniary sacrifice, which is nothing to her, for the sake of making me miserable, which is a great deal to her."

"Every thing is possible in this best of all possible worlds, Ernest, but some things are very improbable."

"Yes, but some improbable things happen, and this is one of them. I tell you that I believe Mrs. Stepney knew all about me—for what I know she may have been down yonder to the Hut, like an old hawk glowering at a chicken-hutch, and seen the merry little home and its inmates—and then have gone back to devise the surest way of breaking it up."

"Even that, Dormer, would not have been a wrong, regarded from the point of view of a certain class. On the contrary, a duty."

Instead of answering this, Ernest Dormer cursed his aunt.

It is disagreeable to write down such facts, but it would be worse to pretend that men of the present age, when they are angry and bitter, do not use language which is both vulgar and wicked. They did the same in past ages. In the next, of course, all will be reformed.

"I think, Ernest," said his friend, "that I am aware of all that I need know. I don't seem to want to have your reasons for charging your relations with malice, which is unaccountable, while their proceedings are perfectly clear on other and very obvious grounds. How would it sound, if put thus? A rich and pious uncle and aunt know with pain that their nephew is living in defiance of the rules of morality; and they gladly avail themselves of his extravagance to come to his aid on condition that he marries a good girl and becomes an orderly man, and they offer him a liberal settlement as a reward for doing so."

"Yes," said Ernest, savagely, "that is the story, told in the purest conventionalism, and that is the way the Stepneys will tell it at their infernal tea-tables. Meantime one heart breaks for certain, and perhaps two."

"Your own!" said Latrobe, looking up with real surprise at what he deemed an extraordinary piece of sentiment from a man ordinarily not sentimental.

"Mine," scoffed Ernest Dormer. "No. Do I usually talk much about myself?"

"Then, Ernest Dormer," said the young soldier, turning full upon his friend, and speaking with a frank dignity which seemed to come instinctively to the true gentleman, "if I understand you, I go no further in the matter."

Dormer looked earnestly at him, but did not reply.

"For nobody else," continued Latrobe, "would I undertake such a task. But not for you will I do it if I feel that I am only helping you one step along a course of shame and misery. You and I are not of the sort of fellows who talk cant to one another, and I hope we are also incapable of another kind of humbug. You have just hinted, for the first time, that you are not going to play fair."

"You know," said Ernest, flushing to the handsome eyes, but making a desperate and successful struggle with his anger, and contriving to speak in a tolerably calm voice—"you know that when any body but a friend says such a thing—"

And here his voice in its turn conquered *him*.

"One knocks him down," said Latrobe, completing the sentence for his companion; "and when one's friend says it, one asks him what he means. I will tell you what I mean. Your debts paid, your income secured, and yourself married to Miss Conway, what then?"

"What then? We live in her father's house at Naybury, as stipulated by Mr. and Mrs. Conway. I don't understand you."

"You intend to live there always, and to behave to your wife as if your marriage had been a love match?"

"I intend to behave to my wife with all the attention, respect, and kindness in my power. Whether affection may come later I know not. But she shall have no reasonable cause for complaint. I know her to be a most amiable and admirable girl, and though the marriage is forced upon me she shall never know that. Miss Conway does me much honor in accepting me, and she will find me sensible of that honor."

These sentences were somewhat abruptly given out, but Ernest Dormer spoke proudly and sincerely. Of course it was not much to promise in regard to an affianced bride, and it was less than nothing, and far worse than nothing, supposing the received ideal of marriage to have been in question. But—men are very tolerant of men—Walter Latrobe appeared to be satisfied.

"I believe you, my dear Ernest. I should tell a lie if I said that the match seems to me to promise very well for your happiness; but we must take things as they are."

"It is my turn to ask you, Walter, why you put such questions to me?"

"Because you spoke of more than one broken heart."

"I understand. And the man whom I call my best friend instantly sketched out a black picture, in which I was the principal figure. You were good enough at once to dart at the idea that, having married for worldly reasons and against my wish, I should revenge myself on an innocent wife, and make her miserable because I was discontented."

"You put my thought into coarse words."

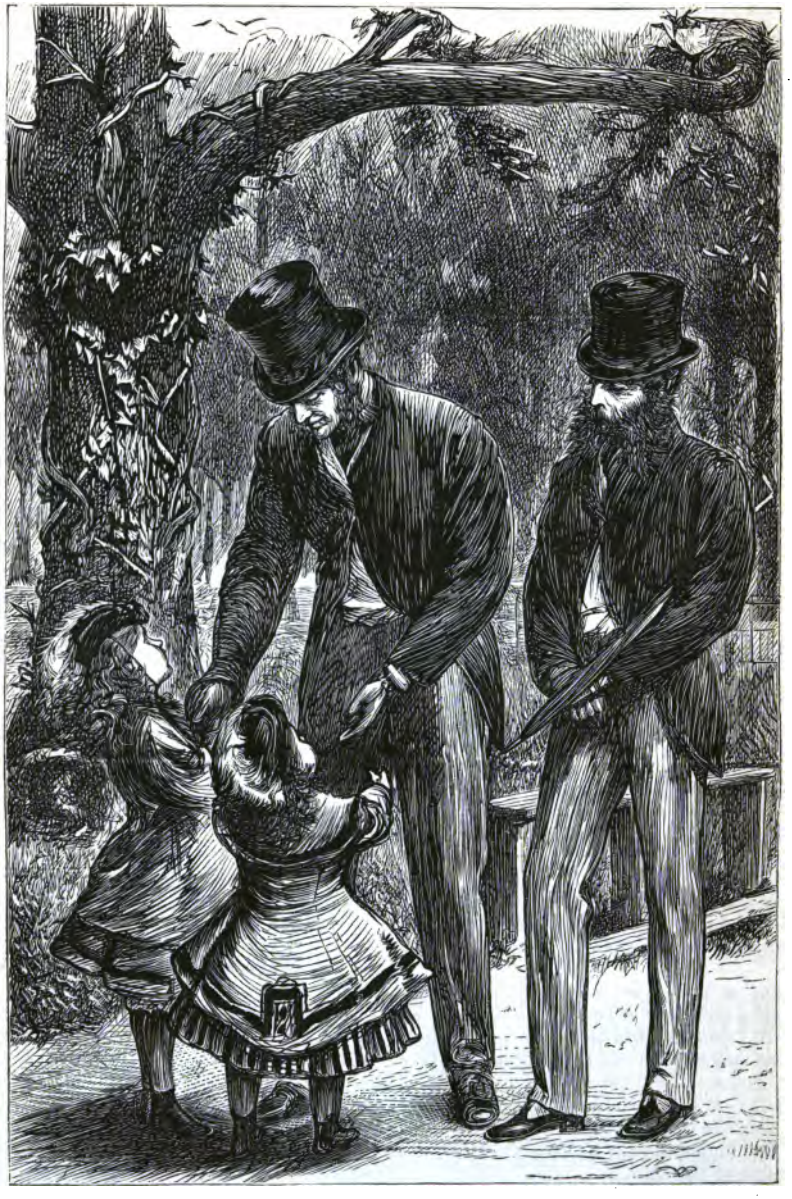
"But it was your thought."

"Yes," said Walter Latrobe, with his truthful look.

"And it was mine for an instant," said Ernest Dormer, seizing his friend's hand with a sudden grasp—an action altogether apart from the undemonstrative manner of the day—"it was mine, I am ashamed to say, for a moment; not, by Heaven! that I ever believed myself capable of being a scoundrel. But the bitterness that came over me, and that always comes," he added, fiercely, "when I think of the way this has been forced on me, makes me unjust to myself and every body else. You have spoken so bravely and faithfully to me that I can't help meeting you with the same frankness, though you know that I am not much given to making revelations of my feelings. Walter, I have been so damnably wretched for the last month that I have envied every fellow who has been killed in a railway or stifled in a coal-pit."

"Every thing you tell me, old man, makes it clearer and clearer that the marriage ought not to take place."

"It must and it shall," returned Ernest;



MOPES AND THE DORMOUSE.

"and what is more, I will try to make it a happy one for the person chiefly concerned."

"So may it be. And now you had better go away—go out of town, I mean. Don't let any body know where. Be away for a few days."

"Yes," said Ernest, turning very white. "I understand. But you must have my address. I insist on that. And you must write to me," he added, earnestly.

"I had better not. See me when you come back."

"Write to me, I tell you," said Dormer, emphatically. "Promise that."

"Yes, I will write," said Latrobe. "You will go this afternoon. Leave me word where—leave a line at the Octagon."

"I won't go there. The fellows congratulate me. I will send a note there, though, or to your place. You've promised to write—no silence for reasons of discretion—I shall have a letter, after."

"Yes, I say. Good-by."

"I will thank you when we meet, my dear old Walter."

"See, first, that you have any thing to thank me for," muttered Latrobe.

In another minute they would have separated, when suddenly two cries of joyful surprise were heard by the men, and the next moment Ernest Dormer was the prisoner of two children. One little girl clasped his leg. Another laid as firm a hold upon one of his hands as both of her own could give her. The child at his hand might be about six years old, the other about half that age.

"What! Mopes, and the Dormouse, too," said Ernest, leaning down to kiss them. "Who is with you, dears—who is taking care of you?"

"I am taking care of the Dormouse," said the elder child; "but now you must take care of both of us, Kraken, and take us home."

"Yes, Kaken, home," lisped the little one. "We's lost our way," she added, opening her large eyes as if she was recounting a very clever action.

"But, Mopes, you were surely never sent here by yourselves. How could—any body be so foolish?"

"Nobody is foolish," returned Mopes. "But Sara has enough to do in nursing poor mamma, so I took the child out for a walk," she added, with the dignity of a matron.

"Nursing, dear? Is mamma ill?"

"Very ill, Kraken; and you must come and cure her."

"Vey ill, Kaken," echoed the Dormouse. "Tummun turer."

"How long has she been ill, Mopes?"

"I don't know. Many days and many nights; and the doctor won't let the clock strike."

With a hasty farewell to his friend, Ernest Dormer yielded to impulse, and hurried from the Gardens with a rejoicing child at each hand.

"*That* looks well for the marriage," said Walter, quietly. "I shall wait further orders. To be hit so hard, and yet not hard enough to make him do the right thing. Now I could not bring myself to feel for any woman—at least any woman of that sort—what Dormer feels for Lucy. I suppose my nature is sterner than his. But if I could feel as he does now, would I tear my future into tatters for the sake of position? Why, he had got hold of a person he loved, and they were out of the way of want, and all that he was afraid of was the going to quod for a fortnight, and passing through the Bankruptcy Court, and being mentioned in the papers, and having his name taken off the lists of the Octagon and the Empyrean. All those dreadful things done, he could settle down with his Lucy, marry her if he liked, and be happy. Of course, he would be a most awful idiot to do any thing of the sort, if he was not sure that he knew his own mind. But he is desperate spoony on that little female, I never knew how much till to-day. Still not enough to prevent his making himself miserable elsewhere. Position, and perhaps the comforts. Well, yes, I think he cares about the comforts, though he doesn't make a fuss over them like some of those epicurean asses at the club. He might have had a good deal of that, too, at the Hut—she is very handy, and he might have earned a lot of tin from Sam Mangles and elsewhere. He is quite right to do what he is going to do, and he is a great fool for doing it."

CHAPTER XIV.

OLD FRIENDS AND A PHOTOGRAPH.

Charged with her self-chosen mission—not one of the class especially favored by Mrs. Bulliman, yet one whose avowed object that lady might, on conscientious grounds, have approved—Mrs. Faunt, having committed her Lar and her Penates to the protection of the superior powers by the simple process of locking up her cottage, proceeded on her journey to London. The excellent woman was unencumbered by luggage, except a portly basket, containing, among other things, refreshments for a traveler, and a handsome silver-cased bottle, whose costliness might have made an observer suppose that it was not in the hands for which it had originally been destined. This Mrs. Faunt took care to fill, in a somewhat secret manner, at the railway station, and the cordiality with which she imparted sups from her flask, during the journey, to sundry of her fellow-passengers in the third-class carriage won her considerable favor. Indeed, a thin young man, of shabby-genteel appearance, who wore a cap over his short hair, and who sat as far back as possible into his corner at the stopping points, as if unambitious to attract the attention of officials, expressed great ocular admiration of the article of luxury, and just previously to nearing the large and dirty manufacturing town at which he was to alight made an attempt to sit next to the good-natured lady. But his attentions were not, perhaps, appreciated, or perhaps they were. At all events, when he crossed from his corner to Mrs. Faunt's side, and seemed very curious about the scenery, Mrs. Faunt quietly imitated his movement, taking the place he had quitted, and moreover took an early opportunity of bestowing upon him a slightly contemptuous wink, a mark of regard which induced him to color very highly, though perhaps not with the sensations which such a token from a lady should inspire in the bosom of a young gentleman. He remained in a sort of collapse until the train stopped, when he hastily slid rather than stepped from the carriage, and disappeared. Mrs. Faunt was then pleased to laugh a little chuckling laugh, and once more to refresh herself from the silver flask, at which she looked for a moment in an affectionate manner, as a mother might look upon a child whom she had preserved from some danger. We regret to have placed a lady in a third-class carriage, but the little incident will have relieved the reader's mind from any apprehension on her account. Mrs. Faunt was

quite able to take care of herself and of that which was hers.

Another incident of the journey afforded her less satisfaction. The silver flask had become empty at an earlier date than Mrs. Faunt had intended, and she availed herself of another stoppage to fill the vacuum caused by her liberality to her companions. While she was keeping a watchful eye on the young lady who was pouring in the best cognac (how bad was the best need not be said), Mrs. Faunt was touched on her ample shoulder by a stranger, who said:

"I am very glad to see you!"

He might have been, some joy is too deep to produce appropriate effect upon the voice. But the tone was one of extreme gravity, and when Mrs. Faunt reluctantly turned her dark eyes from the young lady and the flask and looked at the speaker there was nothing in his face to testify to the sentiment he had avowed. He was a tall, somewhat military-looking person, in black, closely buttoned up to the throat, though the afternoon was a warm one. Mrs. Faunt's talent for repartee was usually ready, nor had it deserted her then.

"The gladness is all on one side, then, for I don't know you."

"Are you quite sure?" said the stranger, not with much apparent affection, but as if he chiefly desired to hear her voice again, for he looked away while listening for her reply.

"Safe as houses," returned Mrs. Faunt, something pertly. "Now, my dear, take my money."

Which my dear did with an air of supreme disgust, and in her turn looking away as she handed Mrs. Faunt her change. It is pleasant to note how well the early simplicity and nobleness of mind endure in the case of many young women compelled to commercial pursuits, and how distasteful to them is the coarse process of mercantile transfer. It is not wonderful that they often give you wrong change and bad money when the whole business is so palpably revolting to their refinement.

Mrs. Faunt retreated to her carriage, and the stranger rather pertinaciously followed her, and saw her get into her place. When the officer came along to examine the tickets the other accompanied him, and listened to Mrs. Faunt's replies to several questions which were put to her about her ticket, and its place of issue, as to what she had paid for it, and whether she had shown it at any previous stations, and which. Then the train went on, and a mechanic in the carriage said:

"Them questions seemed put for a purpose like."

So Mrs. Faunt thought, and she held her peace until she reached London, and in the mean time did not make a single application to her spirit-store. She did not know the stranger, and, for reasons of her own, she was disquieted at his wishing to be able to claim her acquaintance.

But here was King's Cross, and she must get out. The train, however, was a heavy one, and there were plenty of imperious and dominant first-class passengers to command the services of the officials, and plenty also of experienced and bustling second-class travelers to cajole and shoulder them into the luggage pen; so a third-class person, without any thing to look after, could easily escape unnoticed in the dusk, and Mrs. Faunt glided away, but thought that she saw her inquiring persecutor watching the faces of the crowd that was clamoring, and abusing, and growling, and pointing, and gesticulating around the boxes.

"Joy go with you and a bottle of moss," muttered Mrs. Faunt, as she went out from the terminus, not exactly knowing what she meant much more than we do, but it may be supposed that she was reciting a little song of satisfaction at having eluded the watchfulness of the stranger. And she crossed into Gray's Inn Road. Then she turned aside into an alley and watched for a good half hour to discover whether she were to be followed. At last, satisfying herself that she was not, Mrs. Faunt emerged, and walked boldly, and not with a hurried pace, down the squalid Lane, and into Holborn. She might have taken a shorter cut for the street which she wanted, but, all-worldly and wide-awake as she was, she nevertheless yielded to the inextinguishable wish that drives a Londoner who has been some time away from his city into the first of its great, noisy, brilliant, crowded arteries which he can reach.

Mrs. Faunt treated herself to an hour of Holborn, and enjoyed that hour. For a certain class of women such a lounge in such a place has a marvelous attraction. For it she will leave her comfortable fireside and creature comforts on an evening when her male acquaintance think her, and occasionally convey to her that they think her, an idiot for going out. For it she will even renounce the pit of the theatre and the subsequent hot supper, and will come home to a house deserted by its lord (who is at the tavern) and a cold bone. For it she will risk the fiercest quarrel with that lord, when it is his pleasure that she should stay with him and mix his grog while he smokes, and her pleasure lies in the other direction. Mrs. Faunt, answerable only to herself, had a good spell of Holborn, and saw sundry of its sights after dark. She was pushed and hustled, and her dress was a good deal trampled. She stared into the shops, and even made long halts before them; though it was hard to conceive what interest the contents of the windows could have for her. Yet she looked angrily round when any one ran against her, and interfered with her gaze at meerschaum pipes, and photographs, and costly china, and velvet chairs. She was savage with omnibuses when they delayed her crossing over, and she crossed several times, not without peril. She saw a tradesman's child hurry over the roadway to post a letter, and in her reckless rush encounter a cab-horse, and fall, and as the

child's head hung over the shoulder of the Samaritan who was carrying it to a doctor's Mrs. Faunt saw another child, of about the sufferer's age, but precocious in crime, cleverly steal the little shawl of the victim, dive amidst the legs of the by-standers, and escape. She saw a very respectable man examining the books on a stall, and while the lad in charge was taking another customer's money she observed respectability slip into its pocket a volume not worth sixpence. She felt three or four attempts on her own pocket, but having picked this herself before plunging into the crowd, she scarcely took notice of the efforts, except to turn and see a lean boy skulking off, or to mark the preternatural unconsciousness with which an older but undersized young scoundrel turned to the curb and looked serenely to the heavens. She passed Gray's Inn gate and saw a lady, whose veil did not quite conceal her prettiness, descend from a cab and hurriedly enter the inn at an hour when clients do not usually find legal advisers, and other eyes than those of Mrs. Faunt observed her. A pale, well-dressed man, with compressed lips, glared at the disappearing figure, and a stout man with him, a detective officer, held him back from following. The mild eyes of a sister of mercy, out on a far different mission, also took in the scene, and her lips murmured a prayer. The panorama finished with a desperate fight between two Irishwomen who had strayed, quarreling, from the lane, and each of whom had been unable longer to bear the unfavorable sketch of her family history and personal character tendered at the top of a hoarse voice by her companion, and with the entrance of the police on the scene Mrs. Faunt retired from her amusement.

One additional reason for her having thus beguiled an innocent hour was present to her. She had a visit to make, but did not wish to make it very early. But the hour had now come at which Mrs. Faunt thought that she might carry out her intention, and therefore, proceeding westward, she turned to the right, into one of the small streets which lie north of the great thoroughfare.

Mrs. Faunt stood before the window of the shop of Mr. Dudley, the medical gentleman of whom we saw something at the outset of our story.

The shop was not closed. Not that the hour for closing an apothecary's shop had come, to justify Mrs. Faunt's idea that business would be over, but Mr. Dudley's ways were mysterious; and when it pleased the practitioner to order up his shutters and turn out his boy Mr. Dudley did so without the slightest regard to the habits of other tradesmen. Tradesman, indeed, he used often to assert angrily, when under the influence of liquids scarcely less deleterious than those he sold, he was not, but a professional man, who was obliged to attend to the detail of his profession; and the definition was favorably received when he happened to be in the humor to treat his audience.

Mrs. Faunt watched; she had a talent for watching, and it is an art that requires cultivation. Mrs. Faunt had practiced it for various purposes, the most harmless of them being instinctive self-defense, for many years of her life. She did it without an effort. She saw Mr. Dudley behind his counter. She saw him listening rather contemptuously to a pale young wife (the ring was there), who was showing him, very sadly, the face of a sickly infant evidently about to be soon delivered from the evils of this present world. Yet he replaced the torn handkerchief somewhat tenderly over the baby's face, and though the coppers offered him for the medicine were evidently too few, he gave a good-natured toss of his head as he pitched them into a drawer, and called the young mother back to add a word or two of advice. Then he listened much more intently to the whispered confidences of a servant girl, and having given her a packet, sent her out with a jest, which, however, did not make her laugh. Then he lost his temper with a deaf man, whom he scolded loudly for not instantly swallowing, there and then, a black potion, which Mr. Dudley mixed by rule of thumb, and which very likely was the right medicine, but over which the poor man hesitated, because he did not understand that Mr. Dudley had understood him. Then, the shop being clear, Mr. Dudley had leisure to remember that he owed his boy a box on the ear, and immediately discharged that debt, and while the master was adding some paternal advice, bearing directly upon the youth's spiritual future, Mrs. Faunt entered the shop.

"Good-evening, Gum Benjamin," she said, pleasantly.

Mr. Dudley might have imitated her remark at the railway station, and observed that the pleasure was all on one side. For his own rather good features assumed an expression of even more than their wonted discouragement, and the boy was incensed because the entrance of the lady had checked a fiery oration which he had begun at great speed, and which was designed to apprise his master that if he ever dared to do That again, he, the sufferer, would smash every blessed bottle in the shop and summons him.

Mrs. Faunt repeated her greeting, and while Mr. Dudley is considering how to meet it we may mention that his name was Benjamin, but that the playful adjunct was given in some old days of sport, and bore dark reference to the time when he began to practice dentistry, with afflicting results to some of his fellow-creatures.

"I would as soon have seen the devil," was Mr. Dudley's frank response to Mrs. Faunt. It rejoiced the boy, at all events, for he saw some sort of Nemesis in store for his master, and therefore with utterly unusual alacrity hurried round and set a chair for the visitor, even resorting to the unheard-of and elaborate politeness of dusting it with a handkerchief which he snatched from the counter.

"All in good time," replied Mrs. Faunt, "so

don't be impatient, Benjamin dear. It was always your besetting sin, you know, and is still, or I shouldn't find you still keeping a miserable shop in a back slum."

The exquisite pleasure which this sketch of his employer's home excited in the face of the boy can only be realized by those who have studied the countenances of London lads, and it is not a study to be pursued for its own sake.

"What do you want?" was Mr. Dudley's next and practical remark.

"Nothing that you sell, rely upon that," said Mrs. Faunt. "Though you might have had the manners to offer an old friend something refreshing and stimulating after a long railway journey."

"Where from?" said Mr. Dudley, sharply.

"From the right-hand corner of the middle of next week," replied Mrs. Faunt, very quietly, and setting her head aside at him in the odd way of which we have seen something.

"I have nothing to say to you, and I want to have nothing to do with you."

So ample a renunciation of friendship would possibly chill the regard of the fastidiously sentimental, but Mrs. Faunt was not one of these, and replied, simply:

"Don't make a fool of yourself."

And then she took a bottle of lavender water from a glass tray, and in the coolest manner tore away the red paper, drew the cork, and liberally besprinkled herself with the perfume.

The action might reasonably have enraged Mr. Dudley, but it did not. Perhaps it operated in the nature of a libation to the infernal gods, and stilled the devil, Wrath. Perhaps Mrs. Faunt's last words conveyed more to his ear than that piece of advice, so frequently tendered and so seldom taken, might have been expected to do. At all events, Mr. Dudley turned to his subordinate, and ordered him to shut the shop.

"Did you please to wish it shet, m'm?" asked the youth, with sublime impertinence, and a most respectful manner to the lady.

Mr. Dudley's hand fell to a certain brass machine, like a roller with a handle, used in the manipulation of pills, and it was even betting whether its flight from a practiced and powerful hand would have materially damaged the rebel, or whether the latter, expert at dodging, would have shunned it (as Bruce did the spear of De Bohun at Bannockburn) to the detriment of the plate-glass door. Happily the bolt was not launched, for Mrs. Faunt, laughingly accepting the situation, said:

"Yes, my good lad, I particularly wish it shut."

More and more confirmed in and cheered by the conviction that something disagreeable was going to happen to his friend and master, the boy put up the shutters with an alacrity to which Mr. Dudley had never been able to drive him. Not one fell down and occasioned a row with a hurt passer-by; not one stuck viciously so that Mr. Dudley himself had to come out and wrench it into place; nor was one poked through the glass, though all these disasters had been known to happen on the same night when the relations between employer and employed had been unusually disturbed.

"He can go now, Mr. Dudley?" asked Mrs. Faunt, in a gentle voice.

"He'd better," was the response, with a growl which could by no means be described as gentle.

"Then there is five shillings for you, my boy," said Mrs. Faunt, "and be sure that you are a good boy, and mind all that your good master tells you. What is your name?"

"Cubb, m'm, which you may spell it with two b's, m'm, if you would be so good, m'm. Other name, Spitty, m'm. Cubb Spitty, m'm, and greatly obliged to you, I'm sure, m'm."

The sudden largess had actually astonished the boy into speaking with a boy's simplicity, and had discharged all the hard London pertness for a moment, as one of his master's acids might have discharged a color. But it was only for a moment; his sense of wrongs came back, and but for a stronger impulse he would have dared all Mr. Dudley's wrath by a series of offers to do, or fetch, or ask something for Mrs. Faunt, and would have persisted in this until his master became outrageous. But the stronger impulse conquered. Mr. Spitty thirsted and burned to be off, in order that he might lose not a moment in beginning to gamble away his money with some club friends, usually peripatetic, but who could command a play-saloon (a Jew's garret) when noble sums were to be staked. He did but stay to snatch his cap from under the counter, and with an earnest good-night to Mrs. Faunt, Mr. Cubb Spitty vanished to be plundered. Fast as he ran, many an educated young gentleman was just then driving faster to his club for a similar purpose and doom.

"You should make much of that boy," said Mrs. Faunt.

"I'll make something of him one of these days," said Mr. Dudley; but the tone was not exactly that in which a kind parent or guardian speaks hopefully of his charge. "Now, what do you want here?"

"I think I hinted to you, in a delicate sort of way, not to make a fool of yourself, Benjamin," was the reply. "If polite language has no effect I shall have to try another. Come, we've known one another long enough to dispense with any nonsense."

It may be that Mrs. Faunt, in her amiable desire to produce the required result, used an emphatic word just prior to the conclusion of her sentence, but it is not necessary to interpolate it here. Her class has no feeble terror of availing itself of the resources of our powerful language when conviction has to be wrought or commination to be pronounced.

"I should think that you would hardly care to be seen about here," said Mr. Dudley, evasively.

"That is my business. But you are very right to be careful of me; and as I used always

to say, there is a deal of good in you, only it takes a deal of pains to find it out. So you may do what you have in your mind, and what you were just going to ask my leave to do. Shut up that door, so that I may not be exposed to the vulgar, for you know I hate vulgarity, and then get some supper ready."

"There's nothing. I was going out."

"Then go out, as you intended, and turn nothing into something. You know my tastes."

Again Mrs. Faunt looked steadily at him in her odd way, and that look did its work. In half an hour Mr. Dudley, of London, in the little room at the back of his shop, was entertaining Mrs. Faunt, of Saxbury, at an improvised supper which excited that lady's unqualified approbation. Its details would probably afford no hint of value to a refined housekeeper, or they should be reproduced with the fidelity which belongs to conscientious art, whose object is the improvement of mankind.

During the repast Mr. Benjamin Dudley preserved a silence which might have been called sulky. He did the honors of the table without any manifestation of pleasure, but it was not in Mrs. Faunt's nature, when she had a purpose before her, to be disturbed by such a trifle as the conviction that the gentleman with whom she was supping was restrained by prudential reasons only from mingling in the beverage which he brewed for her in that back-room the very deadliest of the medicaments which he kept in the front. She chatted with some sprightliness, and even complimented Mr. Dudley upon the brownness and curliness of his whiskers and beard. Mr. Dudley endured her liveliness until it became intolerable, as will happen in the case of the liveliness of ladies immeasurably her superiors; but at last Mrs. Faunt fairly composed herself, with her feet up on the little black sofa, to the enjoyment of her compotations. Then, though she had probably never heard of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, or of her charming picture of the hour

"When we meet (with Champagne and a chicken) at last,"

Mrs. Faunt addressed herself, in the spirit of that hour, to reminiscences and epigrams, and then Mr. Dudley took occasion to speak his surly mind, and to signify once more his wish to know what his visitor wanted with him.

"Well, you might wait till I pleased to tell you, I think, considering that it is a precious long time since you have had the good feeling to inquire after me or learn whether I was alive or dead."

"Dead! No, I knew you were not dead," said Mr. Dudley, without any particular intimation that such knowledge was the happiness of his life.

"I know you knew it, but no thanks to you for asking.

"Well, you are alive and here, and now what next? You did not come here only to see me and get your supper, I'll swear."

"Don't say swear, Benjamin, because it's vulgar, and, what's more, the word brings to my mind a remembrance that some people have sworn, in the course of their life, to things that would not bear any great degree of swearing to."

"I'm past frightening, Charity."

"May be so, Benjamin."

"That dodge has been tried until it won't do any more. I tell you that. As you say, I haven't seen or heard any thing of you for a long time, and so I tell you that. It will save trouble. I'm not what I was in the old days, and so don't you waste your damned cleverness. Now, you understand?" He spoke doggedly, almost savagely.

"What? We have grown a respectable medical man, and meet swell physicians in consultation, and are in the confidence of distinguished families, and have repented of the sins of our youth. Only to think. And who would have thought it? And then to see our modesty and humility! Though we are the favorite adviser of the high aristocracy we are not too proud to sell a penny powder for a sick baby, or to let a house-maid have twopennoth of hair oil that she may go out smart on Sunday. How I should like to look over your books, Benjamin. May I? Fetch them in here. There was a time when you would have shown them to me."

"Yes."

"Yes," echoed Mrs. Faunt, as if incensed at something in his tone. "And I'll tell you something more, Benjamin Dudley. There was a time when you didn't dare enter in your books things which I knew of, and had helped you to. Do any items of the kind come to your mind?"

"Jabber!"

Mrs. Faunt was very good-tempered, but she had taken a long journey, and had been annoyed during its course, and she had supped, and she was altogether disposed to relax her rein upon her anger. The word was really an offensive one, and the voice was even more offensive.

"Is it that?" she said, wrathfully. "We shall see."

"Drop it," said Dudley, fiercely.

"Will I, then?" retorted Mrs. Faunt, defiantly. "I have not come a hundred miles and more to be put down by you, Benjamin Dudley."

"I should like to know what the devil you have come a hundred miles for, though Saxbury is more than that."

"Oh, you knew I was at Saxbury. What did you ask me for in the shop?"

"Just to see whether by any chance you would not tell me a lie. You have told me one or two in your time, Charity."

"Yes, I have," said Mrs. Faunt, with rather an exultant laugh. "And you have believed them, too. We were neither so sharp nor so respectable in those days as we are now, eh? But we needn't quarrel, Benjamin. When I look at you, so handsome and so clever, and shut up here in this miserable hole selling rub-

bish for coppers, my heart quite softens to you, Benjamin."

If it did, a person who only heard and did not understand the words would hardly have arrived at the discovery.

"We need not quarrel, as you say," said Mr. Dudley. "It takes two to make a quarrel, and I don't mean to be one of them."

"This is the man who could not be frightened. Why, Benjamin, you are frightened already, my dear man. Do you think I don't know you?"

"No, you don't," replied Dudley. "But you will, if you do not take care of yourself, and meantime you may remember that I know you."

"Oh, isn't that cowardly!" laughed Mrs. Faunt, who had regained the mastery over her temper, and by way of solemnizing that triumph had refilled her glass—"isn't that cowardly, to menace a poor defenseful woman, who crawls to your door, weary with travel, and begs a mouthful of food? You have done some cruel things in your time, Benjamin, but I did not think you would ever be so hard-hearted as this. You make me regret the interest I once took in you, and the pains I gave myself to push your fortunes."

"I can't make you out," said Mr. Dudley. "You were always flighty, and I suppose it has grown upon you. Else you would not lie there talking infernal nonsense. If you have business of any sort to mention, mention it. If not—"

"Well, and if not?"

"I am going out."

"I am not."

"Going to stop here?"

"Not here, Mr. Dudley. Do you mean to insult me? I am going up stairs."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. What's that song you used to sing so well, or did you recite it, I forget? Something about He's no tenant of life's back slums, He comes to the world as a gentleman comes To a lodging that's furnished and taken. Don't look at the brandy bottle like that—your insinuation is in the highest degree offensive to a lady. Has not my luggage arrived?"

"I know nothing about it. Yes, by Jove! there was a beast of a box came this afternoon, and I had to pay a porter. You sent it?"

"I telegraphed that it might be sent. Where is it?"

"Up stairs, I suppose."

"And there is my lodging also. I believe that you have nothing to do with any thing but the ground-floor, Mr. Dudley? I happen to have engaged a room on the second-floor, and I don't see that you have any business with my arrangements. What you paid the porter shall of course be honorably repaid."

"I think you are mad, Charity; but mad or sane, I am going out."

"Leave me here—you may do so safely. I will not rob your till or look into your books."

"You would not rob the till. The other thing you would do from the cunning instinct you always had for learning any thing, on the chance of its being useful some day or other; and if you told me you had not looked at the books I should think your brain was softening. I do not choose that any body should look at them."

"Lock them up, then."

"That you may pick the lock. It would not be the first by scores. I would give odds that you have a picklock in your pocket."

"Then you'd lose, for it's in my bosom, with my purse. But I see that you have preserved a faithful recollection of some of my cleverness. I was always too many for you, and I intend to be so again one of these days, but only for your benefit. You have no idea what a good, kind soul I have become at Saxbury, retired from the vices of this wicked city, and under the sacred ministrations of various reverend clergymen too tedious to mention."

"You! and clergymen."

"Don't speak like that, as if I were an infidel. I tell you what, Benjamin Dudley," she added, suddenly changing her tone of lazy banter for another, "I have known some clergymen in my time, and so have you, and perhaps you need not talk as if it were out of nature and reason for me to have any thing to say to a parson."

"By Jove!" said Dudley, with a scoff he could not repress, "I don't think that it is at all out of nature or reason either that you should have a good deal to say to a parson one of these days, and have to say it, too, before the clocks strike eight in the morning."

"Do you know, Benjamin, that I consider you little, if any thing, better than a brute?" said Mrs. Faunt, so pleasantly.

"I dare say I am. No matter. Are you going to tell me what you have come for?"

"What has procured you the pleasure of this visit, you mean? A medical man seldom gets on unless he studies politeness. Well, I will tell you as much as you need know. I have come to town to find out something which a friend of mine wants discovered. And I have come here because I don't know any place where I should be less likely to be bothered with unwelcome visitors."

"You were wanted some time ago, I can tell you."

"Not much, or I should have been found. I have not been keeping out of the way. I have only been living in modest privacy, but not so retired but that my friends could find me if needful—you, for instance, for you just said so. Are you going to try to frighten me, in my turn, Benjamin?"

"Why should I? Only don't blame me if you are heard of as being here."

"Which means that we are going to a tavern, or somewhere, and are going to write a message?"

"I may, if you pester me. I sha'n't, if you are wise."

"Listen to me, Benjamin Dudley. I see

how the game lies, though I have not concerned myself about you for a long time. At first I thought that you were just what you were when I could be of some use to you—a poor druggist, living in a poor street, from hand to mouth. I see you pretend to be just the same; but from the way you talk, and one or two other things, I believe that you are making a purse, and all you want is to be let alone until you are able to make a bolt. Now deny that, not that your word would go for much with me."

"Then I need not speak. Go on."

"You have spoken, my dear Benjamin, and to good purpose. But don't give way to low suspicion, and above all, don't suspect me, who have been your friend and confidential adviser. I don't want to injure you, and I don't want to hinder your plan. But it shall not be carried out without my leave, to say the least of it."

"Yes," said Dudley, with a shrug. "I thought we were coming to that at last. Plunder. Try it, that's all."

"Not quite all, Dudley," said Mrs. Faunt, significantly. "When I try a thing there's generally something to follow, and that is my succeeding. Now I don't think it can be needful for me to remind you of a few occasions on which we have assisted each other."

"I don't care whether you remind me or not. But suppose I remember every thing?"

"If you do, you will think that it is not quite sensible to hold this tone with me."

"I defy you, and all that you can do. Take that. And now take yourself away, and do your worst," said Dudley, on whose temper this protracted nagging had at last produced its effect. "I will be badgered no longer. If you want money from me you will not get any. Do you hear what I say?" he added, angrily, for Mrs. Faunt had taken up a newspaper that happened to be lying near her.

"It's such a pleasure to see a paper of the same day," she said, "after being reduced to newspapers of a week old, which one had to get hold of any how. What's going on, Benjamin, you used to be a great reader?"

"Not much," he answered, scoffingly; "but there's a case before the Union Street magistrate that may interest you, perhaps."

She turned to the report, glanced over it with a smile, and said:

"Committed. The woman deserves all she got for trusting that kind of doctor. She must have known that he would sell her, if it was made worth his while, and if she had not taken care to provide evidence that would keep him quiet. Every woman is not such a fool."

"One woman is, who is trying to trade upon a power which she had, but has not got now."

"Time, perhaps, has worn it out?" asked Mrs. Faunt, whose dark eyes gleamed, just now, in rather an unwholesome way.

"No, Charity," said Mr. Dudley, calmly; "Death has saved time the trouble."

"You are lying to me," said Mrs. Faunt, sitting up for the first time during their dialogue; "I have frightened you, and you are lying."

"Think both if you like," said he, "but," he went on, again getting into a rage, "you shall have plenty of time to think about it, and all other things, and plenty of the quiet and seclusion you like so if you dare to attempt any thing against me. I tell you fairly that though you are very clever—yes, rascally clever—you *don't*—as you say—see how the game lies. Perhaps after you have paid a visit to Highgate Cemetery you will."

"What shall I see there?"

"See? A great many tombstones, some of them bearing inscriptions which make the devil laugh when he walks about there. But there's one which will not make *you* laugh, nevertheless!"

"Dudley," said Mrs. Faunt, slowly, "you are a shallow fellow. You would always purchase a few days of peace by some clumsy shift, though you knew all the trouble would come back again the same as before. You would always do it in money-matters, and you would give solemn promises which you knew you could not keep. And it was the same in important things, and is the same now. You want to get rid of me at any price to-night, and you have invented a lie which I shall have to look into. Forty-eight hours hence or less we shall be again where we are now."

"Go to Highgate Cemetery, I tell you, and look until you find something interesting to you. And as you were always rather sentimental when not greedy of gain, buy an *immortelle* as you go along, and deposit it, with any tears you may have ready, on a stone which you will find if you look long enough."

"It is false," said Mrs. Faunt, at last surprised out of her bantering manner; "I have a letter—no matter. It is false."

"You have had several letters from *her*—four or five at least. You had one about three weeks ago."

"Yes, I had," she answered, fiercely. "And so she has died since that?"

"I did not say so."

"You had better say what you do mean, man!" exclaimed Charity Faunt, now in an unmistakable rage.

"I hate to give pain, especially to a sensitive woman," replied Dudley, with evident enjoyment of the turn things had taken. "It grieves me to inform you that it is nearly two years since the object of your affectionate inquiries was deposited in the silent tomb."

He drawled out the last words with an admirable imitation of the conventional manner of imparting news of bereavement.

"Two years!" she screamed out. "She has written to me three times since January."

"You must remember the peculiar beauty of her handwriting, then," drawled Dudley.

"She could scarcely write, I know that well enough; but she could sign her letters, and did—what a liar you are!"

"I excuse your language, in consideration of your sorrow, my poor Charity. I am touched—very deeply touched. To show you how *my* heart softens toward *you* I will save you the long search I advised, though of course you will make an early visit to the grave of one so dear. Excuse me for a moment."

He took some keys from his pocket and went into the shop, and the look which Mrs. Faunt sent after him meant small good. Presently he returned with an envelope, from which he took a photograph, and this he quietly laid before her. It represented a tombstone, slightly ornamented, and bearing one inscription. It was in memory of a faithful and attached female servant, whose mistress's name was also given.

Mrs. Faunt read the inscription again and again, and put the photograph into her bosom.

"You might have asked me for it," said Dudley; "but it is yours."

"Yes, it is mine," said Mrs. Faunt, in a low voice. "I felt that I was wrong to leave London. I knew that it was wrong all the time I was going."

"That allegation is considered by the lower class a sufficient excuse for doing any thing wrong," said Dudley; "but I did not expect to hear it from you."

"Don't provoke me just now," said Mrs. Faunt, with glare in her eyes.

"But do not reproach yourself. Even your presence could not have prevented the untimely departure of your friend."

"Forged letters!" And Mrs. Faunt swore an oath of anger.

"Such things, at least, were no novelties in your experience, Charity. I think we have heard of such things. I think that for certain money well and duly paid to a lady of my acquaintance arrangements were once made whereby a wife was enabled to read letters from her husband which he had never seen—do you remember how very imbecile the coroner was at the inquest on that poor lady?"

"You have done a bitter, bad work for yourself, Benjamin Dudley, in lending yourself to this treachery against me, and you will live to know it," said Mrs. Faunt, who had not heeded his last speech. "I had no evil intentions against you when I came to town, I swear it. Perhaps I meant to do you good—I swear I meant no harm. But now—"

"War to the knife?"

"It may not be worth my while, Dudley," said Mrs. Faunt. "I think it is most likely that you are still the beggar I predicted that you would always be, and I shall not waste trouble. But if I do find that I can serve any purpose of mine by making London too hot for you, expect to be served out."

The phrase was a vulgar one, and decidedly unworthy of the occasion, but it was the natural utterance of the speaker. Having thus delivered herself, Mrs. Faunt took up the poor old bonnet and shawl in which she had traveled, and opening a side-door, apparently well known to her, went out, and up stairs, where, as she had truly said, she had taken lodgings.

Mr. Dudley carefully locked that door, and lit a black pipe.

CHAPTER XV.

MANGLING IN HIS LAIR.

It will be remembered, we hope, that at the secret conclave which was held at the Octagon Club soon after the farewell banquet given to Ernest Dormer, a revelation was made by Mr. Wigram to Mr. Mangles, and it was conveyed in a whisper, because some other men came in at the moment. That night Mr. Mangles, having various affairs to attend to, and notably to go to the Opera, could not devote much consideration to the subject. Our friends should be satisfied, nay, grateful, if we take any trouble about them when we have nothing particular of our own in hand. But Mangles liked Dormer, and even at intervals of La Favorita, and although Lady Syleham (whose box it was) and her very pretty daughter Isabella were capital people to help one through an opera, by talking incessantly, and rather well, the question recurred to the mind of Mr. Mangles whether he should say a word to the bridegroom elect. After putting the ladies into their carriage he looked in at two clubs, and heard many things, good and evil, and then he went into Mr. Evans's, and heard many songs, mostly good. Among others, he listened to Horace's *Integer Vitæ*, arranged as a glee, and this curiosity in music amused him, and he speculated, as men will do when the night is old, upon what Q. H. F. himself would say if brought in by his honorable friend Mæcenas (who of course paid), inserted into one of Mr. Evans's comfortable arm-chairs, supplied with a kidney, a potato in its skin, and a glass of pale ale, and requested to listen to Ode XXII., as performed before a party of gentlemen smoking cigars. And as Mr. Mangles strolled on to Lincoln's Inn Fields he kept muttering *Integer Vitæ*.

"No," he said, "the bows and arrows would be of no great use to him, except the long bow, which is a fashionable weapon of offense and defense. Wonder whether Henry Wigram pulled it. I don't think he would. But you never know any thing in this world. I will consider about it in the morning."

But the morning brought its own business, and Mr. Mangles, the editor of a critical journal, had a great deal of correspondence to attend to or to decide on neglecting. It is easy enough to answer letters, but it requires a more delicate instinct to know exactly what letters you may lay aside on the chance of their answering themselves. Mr. Mangles, however, had too long endured persecution by correspondents not to know reasonably well how to save himself needless trouble. He sat down to the enormous table which was the prominent article in his

large and handsomely-furnished room, with the air of a skilled operator, and the beautiful Persian cat that instantly sprang into the luxurious arm-chair which he had quitted did not assume her place with more composure, or more feeling that claws were things to be used only in cases of extremity.

The first letter Mr. Mangles took up was a large one, and he opened it with a mild grunt. Of course it contained a note and a manuscript. The writer was a stranger and a literary aspirant. He was young, and therefore assumed that playful jocularity in addressing an editor which a raw hand thinks so captivating. Further, he mentioned that he had "just dashed off" the article he inclosed, and he had no doubt that he could do much better. A younger editor would perhaps have taken the trouble, as he dropped the proposed contribution into the Drawer of Despair, to have said:

"We can wait until he does much better."

But Mr. Mangles had seen too many of such communications to bore himself by saying a single word.

He took up another, which had no inclosure, but which was a note of eight close sides. It apprised the editor that the writer had taken in the journal from the beginning, but that he and several influential friends had resolved to discontinue it. The *Vivisector* had so greatly fallen off from what it was, that it was evident that an inferior class of contributors was now employed, and the editor was warned that many of the articles gave great offense to persons who were quite as capable of judging merit as any hack journalist.

"I fancy I know that ass's writing," murmured Mr. Mangles. "I'll show the letter to Pruth."

Mr. Pruth was the sub-editor, and was in the habit of calling on his friend and chief, and discussing matters of editorship. It was not yet his hour.

"Now then," said Mr. Mangles, with the tone of a wronged man, as he opened a packet, and eight or ten carefully folded papers fell out. He knew, without looking into them, that they were only food for the spill-box, but he glanced at two or three, and saw that they were religious lucubrations on scriptural texts. The note, a gentleman's, intimated regret that the *Vivisector* gave so much space to theatrical criticism and race notices, and suggested that a series of articles like those inclosed would give a worthier tone to the paper.

"Colney Hatch must be too small for the lunatic population," said Mr. Mangles. "I suppose it has out-patients, who are allowed pens and ink. What's this? Verses. Well, a good squib's worth having. Let's see—

> "The world hath now no joys for me,
> My day of hope is o'er,
> Nor love, nor wine, nor melody,
> Will e'er enchant me more.
>
> "My eyes—"

Mr. Mangles made some cursory remark in reference to the sentimental poet's eyes, and tossed the bard's verse into the waste-basket.

The next was more interesting, inasmuch as it was from a firm of attorneys, threatening the *Vivisector* with an action for libel, unless it apologized, in an article to be supplied by themselves, paid fifty pounds, and six-and-eightpence for that application. The complainant, who had been wronged by the strictures of the journal, was a quack whose medicaments had been referred to only in illustration of the success obtained by puffing. However, Mr. Mangles knew what jurors would do for an aggrieved brother tradesman, and he took up the file of the journal to see whether he had given the pettifoggers a chance. After a glance at the paragraph and its context he saw that he was reasonably safe, but inclosed the menace to a stern and most respectable solicitor who had brought several legal gentlemen, for their attempts at similar extortion, to extreme grief and dismay. And he made a mental memorandum which should not be exactly in the interest of the quack when occasion might serve.

Then, not in the sweetest mood, perhaps, though undisturbed, he opened a letter of introduction from somebody whom he had once talked with, for ten minutes, while the hounds were at fault, and who begged to present to him somebody else, not personally known to the huntsman himself, but of whose talents the latter had heard a good account from an Irish friend whose name had escaped him. Would Mr. Mangles see Mr. O'Bog, and read a manuscript novel and some poems of the young man's? Mr. Mangles did not say that he would see the young man hanged first, but he looked as if, were the alternative proposed to him, he should not require much time for deliberation.

A pleasant odor, suggesting a lady's envelope case, arose with the next note. Every body likes to be flattered; and from the man who tells you that he does not lock up your spoons and your daughters. Mr. Mangles, old hand as he was, read with a certain pleasure three prettily written sides of graceful compliment on an article which he himself had composed. He read with less pleasure the fourth side, which began, "And now—" and which contained the request to which the affectionate critic had led up so charmingly. She wanted Mr. Mangles to give her a box at the Opera for a certain night—a night of extraordinary attraction, and when double prices would be asked at the libraries.

"You are a good judge, my dear, both of literature and music, but—"

You *must* write a falsehood in such a case if you like the lady enough to care about keeping on terms with her; and Mr. Mangles, who liked the lady in question very much, immediately sent her, by special messenger, a reproachful letter, quite scolding her for not having asked for his box before he gave it away, as she well knew that nothing would have delighted him so much as giving it to her, except the being allowed to look in—as he would gladly have done

—and he was really at present unable to see his way to forgive her.

Well, he told stories. But what would you have had him say to a pretty and amiable lady? "I have got an opera-box, but I sha'n't give it to you, because I want to go myself, and take some people whom I like better than you." Would you have a man behave brutally? Very likely the lady was not deceived; but Mr. Mangles had given her no valid excuse for not asking him to dinner.

It is needless, and it would not be altogether gracious, to dwell upon sundry other letters received by Mr. Mangles in his capacity of head of a band of reviewers. A cold world might be irreverent over things which it imperfectly understands. Enough to say that if sundry authors gracefully brought their published compositions under the notice of the distinguished critic, it was probably because retired scholars, unacquainted with the regular habits of business houses, might surmise that their publishers had neglected to forward the volumes. Or, if any special merit or circumstance, which in the author's mind entitled his work to the favorable notice of the reviewer, were modestly pointed out, it may be assumed that this trouble was taken less for the sake of obtaining plaudit and notoriety, than in order to enable the *Vivisector* to fulfill its mission as a faithful exponent of the leading literature of the day.

While Mr. Mangles was laughing at a letter accompanying a volume of poetry, which the author would not have thought of publishing (she said so, and must have known) but that friends had wished that the gratification she had afforded them might be extended to a larger circle, Mr. Pruth was announced.

"How are you, Pruth?" said Mr. Mangles. "What a fine day! Where will you sit? Turn out Fluffy if you envy her the arm-chair."

Mr. Pruth was a small, dark man, who always dressed in black, and never smiled, whence by light-hearted *collaborateurs* he was known as the Undertaker. But he was not in the least saturnine, and was a very good fellow. But he was newspaper all over. He thought, spoke, wrote, dreamed of nothing but newspaper. His first great duty in life was to see that the new number of the *Vivisector* was all right, and his second was to prepare material for its successor. He was an invaluable second to Mangles, and inasmuch as, though a gentleman, he cared little for society and man's companionship (a spinster sister at home, who read theological works all day and narrated their contents to him in the evening over their tea, being the only person whom he was supposed to love), he was especially useful when disagreeable things had to be done, as they would have to be in managing a journal were angels the contributors. The slash that took out a too warm or too caustic paragraph, the manipulation that transformed a ferocious sarcasm into a grave remonstrance, the abbreviation that brought a vast article within reasonable limits, these were Mr. Pruth's doings, or Mr. Mangles said so, and Mr. Pruth accepted the responsibility. Mangles would allow no quarrels with himself for any thing which he chose to say Pruth had done, and so enraged and able men cursed Pruth in his absence, every body's mind was relieved, and the *Vivisector* was capitally edited.

"See here, Pruth," said Mangles, laughing again. "Here is a lady who says that we ought to give her a kind review of her poems because her uncle—no, her second-cousin—was tried by a court-martial in India, of which my father was one of the members."

"I have heard worse reasons given by authors, and so have you," said Mr. Pruth. "If your father helped to get her relative shot, clearly you ought to do something for the family. That's a legal and equitable claim compared to some that I remember. I wish I had kept a collection of such things. I was once asked to write a puff of a play on the ground that the author and myself were vaccinated from the same child."

"You never told me that. That will do again, Mr. Pruth, and I know you won't go and tell it where I shall."

"I don't think I ever told it to any body except my sister, and she did not seem to regard the claim as at all out of the way, and hoped that the vaccinations had been successful. Have you any thing for me?"

"I have not looked half over these infernal letters. Just overhaul the big ones for me—that's a good fellow. I *say*, what did you think of Norman's article, after all, when you came to read it quietly?"

"That it was first-rate, and that Norman didn't write it."

"That struck *you*?"

"Compare it with any thing that he has done before. And then how came he to know so much about medals? It's no cram. I may say this, as I happen to know a good deal about medals."

"And most other things, I fancy, Pruth?"

"Not a bit. I am as ignorant as a pig about a heap of things, but then I have made it my business to know exactly where to find out about most things. I tell you positively though, that Norman never wrote that article. I don't believe he knows a Domitian from a Diocle-sian."

"Degraded wretch—he's as debased as myself. But he has got hold of somebody who does. Well, I'll praise his article awfully, as the only good thing he has done, and see whether he splits up. On second thoughts, I don't know. I might get another good paper by taking things easily. When he sends in a bad one I shall know what to say."

"You must have an article on the Prayer-book next week. Rugeley's really not up to that. He has sent in a thing—here, I wish you would read it yourself. It's not worth setting up."

"Thanks, I won't read it, but I'll tell him what I think of it."

"And Derwent has sent in one of the best things he ever did—out and out good. On private theatricals."

"Ah! and I know where he got his inspiration. Does he say any thing about handsome legs?"

"Yes—a trifle too much."

"Let me have a proof directly, will you?" said Mr. Mangles.

"And here's that paper of Dormer's—it stood over, if you recollect, that it might be used at the right time—it is very good, and this will be just the season for it."

"I know you like his papers," said Mangles. "I think you like him." And Mr. Mangles leaned back in his chair, and mused for a few minutes. His companion, who knew his ways, did not answer, but took out a long paper, printed on one side only, and began looking through it.

"You like Dormer?" said Mr. Mangles, again, after a pause.

"I think he is one of our best men. A little given to letting his reading and writing appear when there is no occasion for such vanity, as Dogberry says, but there is plenty in him."

"Yes, I quite agree with you. Is that his article? No, I don't want to read it—but is that a bit of Greek at the end?"

"Two lines, and I wish that you would tell him to take them out. He shouldn't stick up a fence at the end of the race, it's discouraging to the general reader."

"What are they?"

"From the end of the Odyssey. He says that it is a noble thought which concludes the poem. Ulysses and Minerva are slaughtering in all directions, when the fire from Jupiter's hand falls between them and the vanquished, and the sword is stayed, and he makes it mean that though brute force and worldly wisdom may league to crush the helpless there is a Supreme Court of Appeal."

"Our friend is sentimental," said Mangles, smiling. "That is not his habitual fault."

"It is no fault—in moderation—for our purpose," said the shrewd Mr. Pruth. "But now you mention it, I have noticed that in his papers for some time he has been getting out of the club-cynical, and writing what you call sentiment. I knew that you would stop him when he got too soft, so I said nothing."

"Pruth," said Mangles, "I am inclined to ask you into a confidence."

"I had much rather you didn't, unless it concerns the paper."

"It does not concern the paper, and yet I want to speak to you. It happens that you don't come a great deal into the sort of society that you have just been describing, the club-cynicals, and you live in an honester and purer atmosphere, where people are not ashamed of their natural feelings, and where every thing is not tested by the artificial views of a clique."

"That is a very neat sentence, but I did not know that I deserved it."

"Yes, you do know it, and you know that I very often come to you to take the taste of the smoke-room out of my mouth. Now give me your judgment in a matter that is puzzling me."

"It will not be worth having. I am so out of your swim."

"For that reason I tell you. A friend of mine is going to be married. A good match in every respect—position, money, beauty."

"And mutual affection? After that question, you see how fit I am to say any thing about your friends?"

"Do be patient. The question is a very right one, but that is not the point. In fact, I hardly know how to put the point to you without making you think too much or too little of it. For it may be a great deal, and it may be nothing of the sort."

"With submission, it seems that you do not yourself know the case."

"Just so. But still I can get at your idea. Some of the acquaintances of the engaged man have heard some scandal about the engaged lady. They would no more dream of telling him of it than I should think of throwing up this window and bawling out to that dirty nursemaid there—do you see her?—that she has dropped her shawl. But there may be a friend of his who might feel it his duty to say something."

"Yourself?"

"Or another, if you so decide. But what ought one to do? I need not set before you the difficulty of the position. The match may go on, and be rendered unhappy. The match may be broken off, and the story may prove a lie; and whichever way it takes, the man will hate the informant for the rest of their lives."

"He ought not to do so, if the information be given on sufficient grounds, and as a friend's duty."

"There it is. I have no grounds, that is, none within my own knowledge. And it may be difficult for me to make you understand that from the way a very few words were said to me I form an opinion which I should find it hard to justify except to myself. You never married, Pruth?"

"I never married. I never shall marry. But had I married, I should have sought a wife in a home in which the very word scandal was utterly and totally unknown. I have my own ideas about matrimony. They will not assist you in this matter."

"We shall see. Ought I to say any thing to my friend?"

"Ernest Dormer, of course?"

"Yes, I have no secrets from you."

"But I can't answer you, for I don't know what you imply. Words have so many meanings. To my quiet, straightforward Camberwell mind, scandal means an imputation that a woman is more or less immoral—unfit to be an honest man's wife. Is this what is alleged against the lady?"

"Without answering the point-blank ques-

tion with a point-blank reply, I will say that if what is whispered—"

"Whispered?" repeated Mr. Pruth, with some scorn.

"Why, yes, literally, for it was told me in a whisper, from circumstances. But it would have been said in an audible voice if the coast had been clear. You need not get on the aggressive. I was going to answer you that if I heard of my intended wife (there's no such person, my dear Pruth, don't look hurt), if I heard of my intended wife what is said about Dormer's *fiancée*, the marriage would certainly not take place. And yet I can tell you nothing definite."

"Nobody has been more sarcastic on club-scandals than you."

"*Rem acu.* If I thought or could make myself believe that this was only a bit of the ordinary cackle, do you think I would mention it? But accept from me my conviction that there is something in the story."

"I have heard none. When a woman goes wrong, there is a man and a place and a time, of which we hear something. Have you got any of these?"

"Something about a place, and a very little about a man."

"You know that you may be doing the wickedest wrong. In five minutes the whole business may—I say it is possible—may be cleared up, and then you have the accuser on his knees and a woman stung to death."

"Women don't die of unfounded scandals."

"I could tell you another story."

"Perhaps. But my concern here is rather for my friend, who, if I take the harsh view, is being led into a match with a lady of unfavorable history."

"I shall not offend you if I say—"

"Any thing—hang it! need that be said between us, Pruth?"

"Well, then, if I say that your notions of friendship and mine may be two. I have very few friends indeed, perhaps not three in all. For one of those I would do what I suspect that you have not the least intention of doing for Mr. Dormer."

"What's that?"

"Make it my business, day and night, to investigate the matter, and so be able either to warn him off the marriage, or to attend the wedding with a clear conscience."

CHAPTER XVI.

"OF FRIENDS, HOWEVER HUMBLE, SCORN NOT ONE."

Miss Gracie Clare was fulfilling the brief remainder of her engagement at the theatre from which she was lured by the arts of Mr. Mallow to grace the new burlesque at his establishment. Messrs. Beaumont and Fletcher were minding their business, like practical men, and "Dido and Æneas" was in rehearsal at Mr. Mallow's theatre. It was on one of the last nights of Miss Clare's old engagement that she was coming out at the stage-door (making a parting inquiry of the porter whether any of her admirers had left her any letters or presents), when Gracie was suddenly addressed by a female voice.

"Well, I declare! What good luck, my dear! If there was any body in London I wanted to see more than any body else it was you. How well you look, and how pretty! How odd that I should pop upon you at the right moment!"

It was not so odd, all things considered, because the speaker, having ascertained that Miss Clare was playing in the last piece, had been waiting near the door for three quarters of an hour.

That speaker was Mrs. Faunt. But not now in the mean attire of Saxbury, but handsomely garbed, and looking like a well-to-do matron of the middle class. Only, if any one happened to have taken any sort of dislike to this excellent woman in her baser dress, that sentiment would perhaps not have been diminished by the sight of Mrs. Faunt in her costlier vestments. And with them she had assumed a manner which it may be inferred that she conceived more appropriate to her appearance than her usual careless *brusquerie*.

"Oh, you, Mrs. Faunt?" said Miss Clare, with extreme coldness. "I have not seen you for a long time."

"I have been in the country, my dear, for the sake of my health, which was giving way amidst the dissipations of London. And I am glad to find that I have been missed by one friend at least."

"Who is that?" asked Gracie, to whom it certainly had not occurred that she was the person.

"Why, now, yourself, my dear. You said that you had not seen me for a long time. You say pretty things without knowing it, as the Princess used to drop toads and frogs, I mean jewelry, in that piece you played so charmingly when you made such an effect upon Lord Walter Barbel—don't you recollect?"

"I recollect something about Lord Walter and you, Mrs. Faunt, and I prefer to forget it, if you don't mind," said Gracie, sharply.

"My dear, you were very young, and you easily mistook many things. Don't be angry with me. And how is your dear mother?"

"Very well, thank you. Good-evening, I am rather late."

And Gracie Clare was going away, with a fast step, when the elder lady came to her side.

"I won't detain you, my dear, I'm sure, and you are much too pretty not to have better engagements than with poor old Faunt."

"I am going home to sup with my mother, Mrs. Faunt," repeated Gracie.

"And you can not do better, my dear, I'm sure. Always keep your mother with you

THE STAGE-DOOR.

when you can. I've known it lead to promotion little dreamt of. But just tell me one thing, dear."

"Well?"

"You know Lucy?"

"I know half a dozen. Which do you mean?" said Gracie.

"The egg-lady, you know?"

"Yes, I know her—what then?"

"Where does she live?"

A double motive for a white lie instantly flashed across Miss Clare's mind. She hated Mrs. Faunt, for reasons of the young lady's own, and would therefore have been glad to refuse her any information. But an instinct told her that Mrs. Faunt was after no good.

"I don't know."

"Why, you were such friends."

"Yes, but we had words, and I don't know much about her, except this—she found London did not agree with her, and she is gone to live somewhere in Kent."

"Are you sure, my dear?"

"Quite certain."

"I want her address so much, and I am sure you could get it for me if you were to try."

"So much, do you?" said Miss Clare to herself. "Then we'll see how long you can get on without it. Yes," she said, "I think I could get it for you, if it is a matter of consequence—if not, I'd rather not."

"But it is of consequence, my dear. I have been trying every where for it."

"Has she come into a fortune, brought her eggs to a good market?" said Gracie, who, after the manner of her profession, joked alike with friend and enemy.

"I won't say that good will not come to her. Any how, get me the address, like a kind child. When can you have it?—I could call at your mother's, if you would say."

"I do not think that you had better call there," said Miss Clare, loftily.

"Surely, my dear, your mother is too wise a woman to bear malice, especially when every thing was meant for the best. But if you think it would be obnoxious, I would come to the theatre, and ask for you."

"I beg that you will do nothing of the kind," said Miss Clare, coloring in the darkness. "If you will tell me where to write I will inclose the address to you."

"That, you see, I could not so well do, my dear," said Mrs. Faunt, cogitating.

"*I* don't see it. You must be living somewhere, I suppose," said Gracie.

"Yes, my sharp dear. But I might not exactly wish certain worthy people to know where. But if you will be so kind as to let me have it, directed to Mrs. Jones, pastry-cook, corner of Henbane Place, Holborn—could you remember that, do you think?—stop, here is one of her cards—that will remind you. Could you do it to-morrow?"

"Yes, I think so. I'll try."

"I shall be so much obliged, my dear. And we have been friends so long. You must let me see you again soon. I have a heap of things to tell you. But you are in a hurry—good-night—bless you!"

"You old wretch!" said Miss Gracie Clare, as she turned homeward. "Likely *you* mean any good to any girl. I'll give you a blessed dance about Kent, and then you sha'n't find Lucy. But I wonder what she wants with the poor little thing."

The thought would not depart from Gracie's pretty head, and though Mrs. Nobb had provided a charming little supper for her child, and the dressed crab was perfection, Miss Clare was taciturn, and her parent (parents always suppose the wrong thing) supposed that she had been having a row with her manager about leaving him.

"Governor been cheeking you, Jenny?"

"Like to catch him," was the epigrammatic response.

"You are down on your luck, dear."

"Not a bit, mother. Mother, who do you think was at the stage-door when I came out? Pretended to be casual; but now I see into it; had been waiting to catch me."

"There's such a lot as would like to catch you, Jenny," said the proud and motherly green-groceress.

"Which there am," responded Miss Clare; "but this is another sort of customer. You won't guess in a blue moon. Old Faunt."

Honest Mrs. Nobb's good-natured face became scarlet.

"Spoke to you? Her!"

"Yes, quite affectionate; and wants something."

"If she'd come here she should have something," responded Mrs. Nobb, in a great fury. "I'd stick this pickle-fork in her for tuppunce. That's impudence, if you like. I hope you gave her a bit of your mind, or a bit of my mind?"

"I had it on my tongue, and was going to let out hot, but I thought twice, mother. Now don't say I never think twice, because I do, you old thing! She wants an address."

"I know one as I'd like to give her, up Clerkenwell way, and, for fear of mistakes, I'd have her set down in a Queen's carriage, with a bobby to hand her out. What does she want?"

"Lucy's address."

"The Hut?"

"Ah! if she could hear. But it came over me that it was for no good, so I did a little mild gammon, and said I did not know, and that we had had a row, and that Lucy was in Kent; and I have been plotting how to send her all about Kent on a fool's errand. She gave me a pastry-cook's card to send to."

"My girl," said honest Mrs. Nobb, "we'll keep larks for them as we like—or, leastways, as we don't hate. We won't play games with such as her. Keep out of the way of the pitch-pot, Jenny. Not with my consent do you mix, meddle, or muddle there."

"You are a sensible old woman, that's what you are," said Miss Clare, "and you may come to me for a character when you want to go out as mother to another angel. But, mother, I should like to know what she's up to."

"I'd rather not know, and that you didn't neither. Some devil's business, and it's a comfort to know he looks after his own in the end. Have nothing to say or do with her, my child."

"Not without telling you, mother—that you may swear on a mile of Bibles. Not to flatter you, my old thing! this crab is scrumptious; and now, if I might respectfully hint at exit the Earl of Cork—eh?"

And Miss Gracie Clare winked, first at her mother, and then at a bottle of Guinness, to which the affectionate old lady hastened, in accordance with her child's suggestion, to apply the screw. But not even the tranquillity of mood produced by that beverage, which, were it half a guinea a bottle, would be the draught of the great ones, dissipated the recollection of the

interview or the desire to know Mrs. Faunt's purpose.

When her child was asleep Mrs. Nobb, with maternal precaution, felt the young lady's pockets and found the card.

"I have nine minds and a little one in," said Mrs. Nobb, "and I will, too."

In the morning there was no rehearsal, and a thought struck Miss Gracie Clare.

Ernest Dormer had, in his off-hand way, pronounced Miss Clare to be ungrateful. He had used his influence with Mr. Mangles, and a valuable recognition of the young lady's talents had appeared in the *Vivisector*—not one of those flagrant puffs which are laughed at by every body but the writer and the subject—but a discriminating notice, calculated to make readers observe the lady for themselves. Doubtless in her heart Gracie would have preferred something in a more generously abandoned style, with the word "gem" introduced as often as it could have been managed. But though she would not have ventured to set up her opinion against that of any critic who assured her that she was a miracle of splendid acting and a constellation of feminine fascination, she had the sense to know what served her best, and Mr. Dormer mistook the case in supposing that she was ungrateful. Miss Clare saw her way to a grievance on the part of somebody else, and was therefore very angry with Mr. Dormer in that matter, but she intended to do him a good turn when a chance presented itself.

"I don't know what he may be going to do about Lucy, but that hag shall have no finger in the pie, if I can help," said Miss Clare the next morning. "And I won't do any thing without mother's knowing it, either. Mu-u-u-ther!" she screamed, at the top of the kitchen stairs, in imitation of the cry of a child in the street when the cub is enraged or in terror. "I am going to call upon one of My Authors."

"One of your what, child?" returned a voice from below.

"One of my British Dramatists. Business, mother. Home to dinner, and if you love me—Spanish onion."

"Jenny, Jenny, stop a minute."

And Mrs. Nobb hastily mounted the dark stair, holding some kind of fish in one hand, and in the other a knife, with which the good woman had been disemboweling the creature.

"Now then, mother! I thought you were old enough to know better than to run about with a knife in your hand. Don't let me see you do that again."

"Jenny, one word between us is as good as a heap."

"Better, mother—and what is it?"

"You mind what we was saying last night?"

"Honor, mother, and all serene. You go down and finish your fish, and mind he's fit to set before one of the brightest ornaments of the British stage, who will come back awfully hungry."

"I can trust you, Jenny," said Mrs. Nobb, again descending *ad inferos*.

Mr. Francis Beaumont, as has been stated, was a married man, and he lived in a semi-detached villa in Victoria Road, Kensington, a locality estimable in itself, and particularly pleasant to a man like Beaumont, who was not so absorbed in his own special vocation as not to take an earnest interest in art of other kinds. He had planted himself within an easy distance of certain houses which in days to come will be pointed out to the London explorer as the residences of painters who did noble and lofty things in a prosaic age, and therefore merited far more honor from their countrymen than if such works had been produced when the spirit of the time gave its intellectual magnates dignified leisure for the appreciation of art, and if the chief purchasers of pictures had been other than millionaires, who wished to outvie each other in galleries the value of whose contents were estimated by their owners simply from marks on the counterfoils of their check-books. A future age will not forget to credit the true artists of the present age with their manly resistance to the temptation to manufacture works for the manufacturing *noblesse*, and with the conscientious devotion with which pictures have been produced, though the artist knew that for years and years at least his work was merely to be buried among the rest of the costly furniture of a new country-house, and shut away, in nine cases out of ten, from the eyes whose admiration is his best reward. The man who loves a picture, though he can not paint one, may esteem himself fortunate in being permitted to watch a great painter at his work, and Francis Beaumont found no small part of the happiness of a pleasant life in his friendly intercourse with artists who dwelt in or around the royal suburb.

He was concluding a late breakfast. He liked to breakfast late, and was not the sort of man to be deterred from doing what he liked even by the epigrammatic remarks of his friends, who told him that he borrowed every thing from the French—even breakfast habits. Pretty Mrs. Beaumont, whom he had taken out of an early rising and exemplary country family (in whose house you might have set your watch by the successive appearance of tea-pot, tray, soup-tureen, coffee-pot, and soda-bottle, typical of the five meals), did not approve of this spoiling the morning; and though she had not confided the fact to any body, she had secret hope that after a matrimonial episode to which, for the first time, the young couple were looking, she should be able to carry a reform in this particular. In the mean time the young wife adorned the breakfast-table, and not only permitted her Francis to read the newspaper during the whole meal, but took an interest in any items which he read out for her amusement and instruction. She had not yet acquired the habit of speaking to a servant in the middle of a paragraph which her husband was reading out—which is merely mentioned in proof that these were early days of wedlock.

"Is there any thing said about the new piece last night, Frank?"

"No, nothing. But as you were there, what do you want to know about it?"

"Well, every thing, I think. I want particularly to know what the plot meant, and why Eustace went to America without taking the papers which were necessary to help him to find out his brother. I thought it was the actor's mistake, leaving them on the table at the hotel."

"But, my dearest Alice, it appears to me that you have no soul for art. If he had done what you or I should have done, namely, read the papers and put them into his pocket, where would have been the motive for his galloping over hundreds of miles of prairie, accompanied by the Indian lady with no particular garments to speak of, shooting savages, and nearly being roasted in the prairie-fire? He would have simply gone to Melbourne, taken a cab to the address, and found his brother making out a bill for gray shirtings unchanged, which seems to be the chief business of foreign merchants."

"And you call it art, to make a man go thousands of miles in such a ridiculous manner, Frank?"

"Small things must give way to great. You must give way to me. The common-sense of that story must give way to the Indian lady and the prairie-fire, both very effective."

"Well, you never make such mistakes, dear. All your plots seem guided by sense, and when a surprise comes one sees how cleverly you have been preparing for it."

"You are the wisest, truest, and best critic in London, dear, and I hope the day will not come when you are ashamed of liking the works of the man you liked well enough to marry."

"That's prettily put, Mr. Frank, but it is nonsense. If you do any thing I don't like you will hear of it. Now, Sir."

"I dare say I shall. At present I have my first fault to commit."

"I don't know about that. You had no business to be in such a rage with the coachman last night. You thought I did not hear you, but then, you see, I easily catch your voice. You were using very sad language, Frank, and it is not quite right."

"Hm! abstractedly, that is true," said Francis Beaumont. "But there are exceptional cases, and I was particularly anxious that you should not wait in that lobby, with the east wind blowing viciously. I told the fellow exactly where the brougham was to wait, and when, and he was not there."

"Then it was in my name that you used such dreadful expressions. Oh, Frank, are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"Not in the least. In the book of Etiquette, which I studied before I came courting, it says that common politeness declares that you should talk to a person in the language he understands. That insolent, pig-headed brute would not have understood that I was angry if I had merely told him so."

"And yet you gave him money for himself when you got home. Now if you had refused this he would have had a better lesson."

"Well—yes—but perhaps the poor beast had a wife and children, and their to-day's breakfast might turn upon my tipping him or not. You see how infinitely kinder men are than women, in spite of appearances."

"If I had been a man I would rather have gone without my breakfast than have been spoken to in that way, Frank."

"I dare say I said nothing to him that he is not in the habit of saying to his wife, with the additional point of a little beating. I lived for some time in a house near a mews, and I could hear at night what went on in the house of a coachman. He was always beating either his wife or his horses. And I knew his mistress, who believed him to be the milkiest and kindest of men, and used to praise him to me as a paragon; perhaps the very day after I had opened my window overnight and bellowed at him not to be a ruffian."

"And you never told her?"

"Never. Perhaps he had disease of the heart, and it made him irritable. I could not bring myself to injure him. And most coachmen are alike. If I had to get out a carriage for the third time at one in the morning, to fetch people home in a wet fog, I dare say that I should revenge myself somehow."

"Frank, dear, papa used to say that half the tolerance which affects to be kind-heartedness is nothing but indolence."

"And he was quite right. And indolence is a sad thing, which reminds me that I must get to my work if I am to take you out this afternoon."

"If, Sir, indeed! Was it not a solemn promise that we should go to Richmond?"

"I don't remember the solemnity of the promise. But did not Dr. Laurie look a little solemn when you mentioned it?"

"He always looks so. Do you think I do not know what is good for me, dear?"

"I think you do. I think you showed that you did about eighteen months ago, when, as you said just now, one of my clever and well-prepared surprises came upon you."

"Do you think that surprised me, Frank?"

"A woman told me it did."

"What woman, Sir?—and whom do you talk to about me?"

"One Alice Beaumont."

"Did I say I was surprised? Perhaps I meant at your assurance in taking my liking for granted. I don't remember any thing about it. It is quite enough for you that I am here, isn't it?"

"Quite, darling. Eh! Who's ringing the visitor's bell at this hour. Some of your mystic accomplices, I suppose. I have seen a strange sight or two on these premises lately. Let me get away."

"No, Frank; it is a young lady, very nicely dressed," said Mrs. Beaumont, who had gone to

the window, and managed an askew glance into the porch.

"Have you been advertising for a respectable godmother?"

"No, nor for a goose, Frank, being already suited. I believe that this is somebody for you. I can see her face. Why, Frank, it's that pretty actress girl—you know who I mean. Oh, I should like to hear her speak. Is she—I mean would it be right for me to see her? Say it's right, Frank, if it isn't very wrong."

"But who—who?"

A card was brought in to him.

"'Miss Gracie Clare,'" he read.

"May I stay, Frank?" This in the quickest whisper.

"Yes, dear, yes," he said, something impatiently; "but what the deuce brings—show her in here, Pyne."

"Drawing-room, Frank?"

"Here, I say," said the Master of the House.

"Perhaps she'd like some coffee, poor thing!" said little Mrs. Beaumont, in a low tone. "I dare say they have not too much to eat."

Francis Beaumont was not exactly pleased at the visit, but this kindly speech of his little country wife was too much for him, and he fairly exploded as Miss Gracie entered.

Perhaps Mrs. Beaumont would have liked to see a little more deference and respect in the actress's manner, but Alice was a just woman, and allowed that none of her lady-acquaintances could have come into a room more gracefully, apologized more properly for an untimely visit, and seated herself with a more felicitous arrangement of drapery.

"But then such people as my husband teach them to do it," thought the wife, and the husband would have exploded again if he had heard the notion.

"Mrs. Beaumont was saying, just as you came in," began Francis, "that—"

"My dear Frank," said his wife, coloring.

"Was just saying," persisted the husband, "that you would call this a stage breakfast-table; plenty of flowers, and china, and glasses, and nothing to eat. But the fact is that we had finished. Will you let me order you some coffee—it will be here in a moment?"

Mr. Beaumont, you see, did not introduce the ladies, but he treated the acquaintance as matter of course. And, being a gentleman, he felt it right to explain his laugh at Miss Clare's entrance.

"Thanks, no," said Miss Clare. "I never take any thing between breakfast and lunch."

"I should think not," observed Mrs. Beaumont to herself. "She would be a little pig if she did."

"Nothing wrong at the theatre, I hope?" said Mr. Beaumont. "I left every thing straight, except Dido's song in the cave, which Vetch ought to have composed last night; he had loads of time to compose a song; but those musicians are so dilatory."

"He has sent it me, thank you. I should think that he had composed it on the top of his hat on the omnibus. It has a wonderful family likeness to a dozen old friends."

"Yes, it's heart-breaking work," said the author, very seriously, "to write for these men. They have no invention or originality. And the words are good, Fletcher took pains with them; they begin—

'Will you come to the cave I have furnished for you?'"

"But do you call that original, Frank?" asked Mrs. Beaumont.

"Eh? Well, yes, in a sense. Original enough for Vetch, any how, but he's a poor creature."

"As a musician, I suppose he is," said Miss Clare, "because all parts of the house like his songs, and I notice that when that is the case the critics always call a man a humbug. But he's not poor in another way, for he has just bought two more houses at Brompton."

"May they be haunted by the ghosts of the tunes he has stolen!"

"That would be very pleasant," laughed Mrs. Beaumont. "Frank, your curse has turned it into a blessing."

"I must not trespass on your time, Mr. Beaumont" [Mr. Beaumont. And she kissed him the other day], "which I know is very valuable."

"That's a poke at my late breakfast; but I have been working for three hours already, not without some reference to your interests, Miss Clare."

"But it is not about theatrical matters that I have intruded. I should have talked to you about them in the proper place. This is another thing altogether, and I am rather in a puzzle, and I wished to ask your advice."

"Somebody wants to marry her," thought Mrs. Beaumont; "but she has no business to come here about her affairs. I hope he will have nothing to say to it. I don't know, either," she added to herself, relentingly; "she's a pretty girl, and good, or he would not have let me stay in the room. Why shouldn't she marry, and be rescued from the degradation of the stage? She shall talk to him as long as she likes. I dare say," said the good little creature, aloud, "that you would like to talk by yourselves. And really, if Miss Clare would rather not have any coffee, you might take her into the drawing-room, Frank, I think."

[And why should not she see my pretty drawing-rooms, and learn what a *lady's* taste can do with furniture? Of course I don't care for her opinion, but—she may as well go in.]

"As you please, dear," said the Master of the House; and he conducted Miss Clare into the room in question, which, indeed, pretty Alice Beaumont had made very pretty indeed.

"What a Bower of Bliss," said Gracie. "I hope that Mrs. Beaumont does not think me impertinent for coming down in this way and forcing myself into her presence."

"Mrs. Beaumont is as pleased to see you as I am, Gracie; but what the deuce is the matter?"

"I had better blurt it all out straight, and

you can comb it out afterward," said Gracie, with some confusion of imagery. "I want your advice."

"Don't have him unless he rolls in gold."

"Tchee, it's nothing of that kind. Do you think I should come to you about that?"

"I don't know why you shouldn't. I'm as good as a father to you, I think. Didn't I stand by you at rehearsal, against manager, scene-painter, fiddler, and all, and insist on the song coming where we had agreed? And you to think me heartless!"

"You are not heartless. But you don't care about these things."

"What things?"

"Love nonsense and that. And why should you?" she added, looking round the rooms. "You are settled and happy, and can take the world coolly. Now advise me coolly."

"Go on, Gracie."

"You know," she began, with a lowered voice, "all about Ernest Dormer and Lucy. I was too busy making a fool of myself at John Fletcher's the other day to say much, but I took notice. You held your tongue in an audible manner."

"A good phrase. Well, perhaps I did. The business is none of mine, and I rather like the man, and therefore I did not wish to hear any thing that might put me in a false position with him. But avoiding a needless bother is one thing, and avoiding a friendly act is another. I believe that you will find I can make the distinction. What are you driving at? Speak out, Gracie."

"You know that he has engaged himself to be married to somebody, and that he has broken off with Lucy."

"I know the first, and, as he is a gentleman, I have a right to suppose the second. I am glad to hear it from you."

"Yes, that's the way, of course, to speak of it," said Gracie, bitterly. "Especially in a villa in Victoria Road. All right. I know. Never mind about that. We'll go on as if it was all right."

"Because it is all right."

"But it is not. Lucy loves him with all her heart, and he may go and marry twenty ladies in the country, but you'll find that he does not care for one of them half so much as he does for her."

"The experiment would be objectionable in many ways."

"Don't—don't. You understand me; don't pretend to not. And you know all this just as well as I do. John Fletcher knows it, and you and he have no secrets. In fact, he as good as told me you did."

"He told you more than I ever told him then, but no matter. If it is so, what do you want done? This poor Lucy, who is, I believe, a capital sort of girl, is your friend. Is Dormer not doing his duty in the way of settlement? He is not the person whom I should suspect of meanness."

"There you go again. Nothing but money. That's the golden ointment, warranted to cure every thing, hearts included, and observe the government stamp."

"Well said. You shall say that to the public some day." And he made some marks in a note-book.

"It is nothing about money, Mr. Beaumont."

"Then what is it about, Miss Clare? Do you wish me to go to Mr. Dormer, and represent to him that his conduct in marrying is exceedingly unkind toward Lucy, and that he would do well to break off the match and return to the Hut?"

"If you did, I believe you would give him the best advice he ever had in this world. But ask you to do that? Not I. I know you all better. What I want to say is this: An excessively bad woman—a woman so bad that I can't tell you all about her, though you know I am not meek in the mouth—this woman is making inquiries after him. She pretends to want only Lucy's address, and caught me last night at the stage-door to get it from me; but, putting this and that together, I and mother are quite sure that she means something more."

"Did you give the woman the address?"

"Did I? I told her a lie that reached from the stage-door into Kent, and it should have reached into Kamtschatka if it would have done Lucy any good, or done her any harm."

It is not absolutely necessary to record the process of cross-examination by which Francis Beaumont obtained a sketch of Mrs. Faunt. At first Gracie would say as little as possible beyond giving her earnest assurance of Mrs. Faunt's badness. But the author, being a man of the world, and in two respects, only, like Dr. Cantwell—a good man, who knew what impropriety meant—soon struck on the scent, and followed it up for a minute. Then he said, frankly and kindly:

"My dear Gracie, I didn't want to pain or pester you, but it was necessary that I should understand. Now I understand perfectly, and we can go on without more explanations. This is a bad woman, but I don't see what harm she can do to Ernest Dormer."

"Which, of course, is all you are thinking about. But you are right; she can do no harm to Lucy, who has no plots and secrets, and thinks of nothing but Mr. Dormer and their children—dear little things!—I don't know such sweet children."

"Poor things!"

"You may well say that, though I dare say many a duchess would give her ears to have such children. But I don't believe you are right about what I suspect. Naturally you think me a fool, and I suppose that you fancy my hatred for old Faunt makes me suspicious. Think all that and welcome. There's something in instinct; and I have an instinct that somehow, either through Lucy or not, there's mischief that may hurt your friend, and serve him right."

"You don't mean that, or you wouldn't be here."

"I do mean it in a way, and I don't. When I think about Lucy and her goodness, and her misery, I hate him. And then I think that men, who are all weak fools, except in mere business and that, are always plunging into troubles for want of heart and honesty, and then I pity her. And, besides, he did behave exceedingly kind to me, and got me a puff that got me an excellent engagement, and when I think of that I seem to like him. And so, if there's any thing in the wind, and I can do him a good turn, I will, and mother may say what she likes."

"From which I gather that your worthy mother thinks you had better keep out of the affair?"

"Yes, she does, rather."

"Quite right. Give the wretch a wide berth. Well, Gracie, it seems to me that we are quite in the dark, and that any kind of interference would be about as absurd and Quixotic a business as one can well imagine. For Lucy, you say, you have no fears. The only way in which Ernest Dormer can come to any harm is this—and please to mark my words. If the connection is not fully and completely broken off, and if it is any body's interest to be able to prove that—why, Dormer, if found out, will be in an awful scrape, and will richly deserve it. I, for one, would not put out a hand to save him. But, if you like, I will give him the benefit of the doubt—and, Gracie, I suspect you know how far there is any doubt at all, and whether he is not playing a foolish game—and I will tell him what sort of inquiries are being made. He can decide whether the address shall be given."

"I wanted to write to-day; but still—"

"Tchee—as you say—is it Chinese?—we'll do something. I want you to mind what your mother says, and keep away from this hag. But I will stave her off. Where does she live?"

"I was to write to a pastry-cook's. Here is the card."

"Leave it with me."

"And what will you do?"

"First, gain time. Secondly, worry the hag. Thirdly—we shall see. No wise man declares on three objects at a time."

"I believe that you are a good creature. I fully expected to be dismissed in the most polite manner, and to be assured that you really did not see your way to any meddling in the matter."

"And that's the answer you ought to have had. And that's the answer any body will have ten years hence. But somehow, although I take great pains with myself, I can't quite get out of my bachelor habits, or forget how to spell the word lark. Yet I look grave enough, don't I?"

"Owls is flippant, comparingly."

"I'll do this, though, and tell you the news when I get any."

"Then I'll go. Francis, if there ever was a little lady, your wife is one. What does she care for your approval? says you. Which is true."

"You are quite right, Gracie. And I deserved a good wife, didn't I?"

"That's neither here nor there. Good-by, Mr. Beaumont."

Mr. Beaumont, having dismissed his visitor, betook himself to his study. The world knows nothing of its greatest men. It was supposed by those who were acquainted with Mr. Beaumont's punctual habits in business matters, and who heard him cited as a model of orderliness and propriety, that this author's work-room was an elegant cabinet, in which all was neatness, and that he wiped his pens, laid away his litter in a covered waste-basket, and never inked the pretty carpet. He himself fostered this idea, and we have heard him rebuke even John Fletcher for carelessness. But a man is a poor creature who is not a law to himself in some matters. Mr. Beaumont had a theory that a man should have a Den somewhere in the world. And he had always in bachelor days contrived to have one, in which disorder, as it seemed, was supreme. His wife had fitted up and decorated the nicest little room for him, on the ground-floor of the villa, and used to put flowers there every day, and constantly adorn it with some feminine fancy. And during the first months after their marriage Mr. Beaumont consented to sit, arrayed in velvet and conjugal red slippers, a model of an elegant author-craftsman. During this time, while his chief business was to be ready with a smiling answer when a pretty face looked in and asked him how he was getting on and whether he wanted any thing and whether he should soon have done, and while his attempts at work were somewhat interrupted by the great pains bestowed upon his whiskers by his admiring wife, the elegant little room answered its purpose very well. But later, when the young wife acquired more repose and the young husband had to work harder, Mr. Beaumont suddenly moved himself up stairs into a garret on which he had been casting a secret and resolute eye. Availing himself of a couple of days when his wife was visiting her parents, he basely brought to the refined villa a cartful of his old furniture from his bachelor chambers—a terribly stout but hideously ugly table, a battered old desk which had borne up his manuscript from the time when he was struggling into magazines to the time when magazines were struggling for him, a vast oak chest filled with the memorials of years of an odd life, three or four prints in the wormiest of frames, and a huge arm-chair which had once belonged to a monthly nurse. This pleasing assortment of goods Mr. Beaumont conveyed up into his garret, and dire was the astonishment of the little matron when on her return she found the graceful nest deserted, and the beloved bird perched in this strange roost. But she was too good a wife not to understand the fitness of things, and the Den became an institution. After a time the loving

Alice learned to like it better than any room in the house, and her happiest hours were spent in the huge, long, deep chair, reading, dozing, or working at some very small garment, while her husband's rapid pen was performing the satisfactory chemistry which turns ink into gold. No visitor was ever allowed here, and Francis Beaumont had once or twice ventured to impart a sort of wish that no servant might be permitted to enter either; but Alice felt that the line must be drawn somewhere, and the duster was tolerated, rather growlingly, by the author. Here he worked, and well, and the nest was kept for the reception of literary or other clients, who, when they came by appointment, found Mr. Beaumont in the red and velvet, writing in the most elegant manner, and looking as a picturesque author would wish to look when painted for posterity.

"You must and shall see people in a room that is worthy of you, darling," Alice had said, holding on fast by his whiskers.

"Any thing to please you, dearest," had been his dutiful reply. "And," he had added, for he was frank to transparency with those whom he loved, "it is the right thing in a business point of view. Nothing like showing people that you can be prosperous without their help—they get delightfully ready to apply the moral of the ten talents, and give to the man who has got plenty."

"Hush, dear," said Alice Beaumont, who had been too well taught not to know better things. "That is not the moral of the ten talents—it means that we are to be diligent, and use our advantages, and do the best for ourselves."

"Quite right, dear. I have done the best for myself, in marrying a wife who loves me too well to let me talk nonsense."

"As if I could tell you any thing you did not know! Only I thought you might have forgotten," said Alice, "and I am so very late from the school-room."

It will be inferred that they understood one another, and that Mrs. Beaumont was not likely to ask more questions about Gracie Clare's business than Francis Beaumont thought it well to answer. The little wife, however, was not long in following her husband up into his beloved garret, and in seating herself in the great chair. He was writing a note, and stopped two or three times for reflection.

"Frank," she said, "there's some mischief in that note. Tell me about it, Sir."

"What makes you think that, Mrs. Beaumont?"

"Because I very seldom see you hesitate over a note. You are devising some wickedness. Tell me."

"You don't ask what Gracie Clare wanted."

"Ask? Of course not. Isn't it your duty and privilege to tell me every thing without being asked. I wonder whether my guess was the right one?"

"Whatever it was, no."

"She is not going to be married?"

"I asked that, of course, though I don't know why she should come to me about any marriage except her marriage to Æneas."

"What *do* you mean, Frank?"

"Didn't I tell you that Fletcher and I are writing the part of *Dido* for her in the next burlesque?"

"I forgot the marriage. I don't think it was mentioned in our school-book."

"A very sad omission; but never mind, dear."

"Ah, you are laughing at something. Tell me directly."

"Yes, while we are out—I suppose we are to go to Richmond, and I have sent round to order the brougham at three o'clock. Will that suit your ladyship?"

"It will suit her very well. But what did Gracie Clare come for?"

"See here, love. I can tell you all about it, but the story is quite uninteresting, and it could only be explained by some details which you may just as well not hear simply because they relate to coarse and vicious people."

"Then don't tell me any thing about it. But I am sorry that nice girl should be mixed up with such things."

"She is not, and is behaving particularly well. And there was something frank and simple in her coming to tell me about it. I have a sort of reputation for stern wisdom, so folks come to me for advice, and let me alone when there is nothing disagreeable to talk about."

"Do many folks come to you on such errands, Frank?" asked Mrs. Beaumont, laughing archly. "I mean folks like Miss Clare?"

"No, your Sauciness. This is my first consultation since our marriage."

"Do you charge any fees, Sir?"

"I don't understand you," said Beaumont, pretending to be puzzled.

"Then I'll come round and make you understand pretty soon, as one of our governesses used to say, and we knew that the next moment a good slap was coming."

However he did not seem much frightened, and it is not upon record whether the punishment, or any other, was administered.

Mrs. Beaumont scarcely referred to the subject again. She cared about only two things in the world at that time. One was her clever and devoted husband, and the other was something in the future, something which filled her home with a new and not untroublous joy. What were the squabbles and intrigues and worries of the world to her, as she laid her fair little head on her husband's shoulder, and they drove almost in silence to their country dinner? It is a happy time when a man and a woman can be long silent together, and love one another the better that neither speaks of love. A few years later, and silence is perhaps thought to mean either sorrow or sulks.

But before the husband wound his arm round Alice's waist, and finally settled down for that calm and happy drive, he posted a couple of let-

ters. One of them was to the address given by Mrs. Faunt to Gracie. This letter was not in Mr. Beaumont's own writing. He had called on a friend whose hand was not so well known as his own, and who further disguised his caligraphy, involuntarily, by the agitating aid of a slight attack of *delirium tremens*, and Frank got the note written almost before the writer understood what he was doing. Mr. Beaumont then gave his friend a brief but severe lecture on his absurdity in drinking and smoking too much at the same time, and affectionately implored him to stick to one excess only. The other letter was of some length and in his own hand. Then, with a tranquil mind, as became one who had served a good girl, given a friend sound advice, and prepared a plot to hurt the wicked, happy Frank Beaumont dismissed all thought but that of the sweet little wife nestling by his side. How very delightful life would be if we could always be at that date—always have been married a few months and be always going to have our first baby—being also able always to have a brougham and a Richmond dinner.

"I have nine minds and a little one in," good Mrs. Nobb had somewhat oraculary observed when she found the yellow card in the pocket of her sleeping child. "And I will, too," she had added, with determination. Which utterance shall be explained in narration.

Mrs. Nobb completed her preparations for dinner; for though the honest, hard-working green-groceress cared little for her own comforts, and on a busy day was quite content to snatch her own meal on her counter or in the corner of her shop (her business not lying among customers who would have fastidiously taken offense at her having to empty her mouth before she replied to their vegetarian inquiries), she made a sacred point of caring for the comforts of her daughter. When Jenny's repast was in question Mrs. Nobb had slight hesitation—or, in her own vernacular, made no bones—of leaving the shop to take care of itself, with such imperfect protection as it might derive from the superintendence of one of a long series of objectionable little girls accredited to her by the parochial authorities, and each of whom turned out to be more objectionable than her predecessor, especially in the way of stealing the fruit which she ought to have watched. To-day Mrs. Nobb was much exercised by the profligacy of her subordinate, a young lady of thirteen, with a large connection among the street-boys, who benefited largely by her unprincipled liberality. Nevertheless, the dinner being well in hand, Mrs. Nobb dressed herself hastily, and, securing the temporary services of a neighbor who owed her money, and who undertook to mind the shop, the matron went forth to do that which she had declared she would do.

Fortune, which favors the bold, was propitious to Mrs. Nobb, for she had not waited long in the pastry-cook's shop in Holborn when the person whom she wished to see came in. Mrs. Nobb put down a half-eaten sausage-roll, and waited for a minute with her back to the customer.

"Letter come for me yet, M'm?" said the latter. "Name of Faunt?"

"There have not, M'm," said the mistress of the shop, coldly. She was a respectable woman, and somehow did not like the looks of the inquirer. Business, however, was business; and Mrs. Faunt had placed the matter on a pecuniary basis.

"Well, that is strange. I'll call again. Bad luck now, better next time." To which promise and proverb the mistress of the shop made no reply, not having included any thing of the sort in her bargain.

"I think I'll comfort myself with a sup of ratafia," said Mrs. Faunt.

She was served in silence. As she raised the glass to her lips Mrs. Nobb turned round, and was instantly recognized.

"Well and a day!" exclaimed Mrs. Faunt, gushingly, "if this isn't better than good. Expecting a letter and beholding a friend! Before more words, you will do as I do, Mrs. Nobb? Another glass of ratafia, M'm, unless this lady puts a name to any thing else."

"We have nothing else," said the shop-mistress, without rising.

"Nothing for me, M'm," said Mrs. Nobb, "not that I dare say it is not very good, I'm sure, but you will understand me when I say that I would rather you handed me poison than any refreshment at the expense of this person, who is no friend of mine."

The woman looked rather more favorably at Mrs. Nobb after this frank declaration, but made no further remark.

"If such are your sentiments, Mrs. Nobb," said Mrs. Faunt, "and why they should be is best known to yourself, I am at a loss, M'm, to know why you have been so good as to come here?"

"I suppose, M'm, that I may come into any shop which happens to be open, without saying with your leave or by your leave," returned Mrs. Nobb, who, like Dr. Johnson, was not inclined to let an antagonist have even the advantage of a stamp.

"Only remarking, M'm, that there is one shop in which it might be better for you to keep, which is a paltry little green-grocer's, not a hundred miles from Seven Dials, I wish you a good-afternoon, and better manners."

"I want nothing of this kind here," said the pastry-cook.

"You are quite right, M'm," said Mrs. Nobb, who saw the business character of the protest; "and having paid for what I have not eaten, my appetite being took away by the sight of villainy, I shall go away, advising you as a fellow-tradeswoman, though a stranger, to keep your eye on the spoon belonging to the brandy cherries."

"And this is gratitude from a woman whom I have sought to serve," said Mrs. Faunt, plaintively. It may be supposed that she would

have answered in a different way, but that she did not want to quarrel outright with the shopwoman, and possibly miss a letter that might be on its way.

"Sought to serve, you wretched, vile, old viper!" said Mrs. Nobb. "If ever I get a chance to testify at the Old Bailey what sort of services you have been doing all through your wicked life I only pray I mayn't have a sore throat to prevent me speaking out."

"I think you had better both leave the shop," said its mistress. "And here, M'm," she said to Mrs. Faunt, holding out what was apparently a coin in paper, "you had better take this back. I prefer taking in no letters. It isn't in the way of my business. Tom!" she cried, down a trap-door.

"M'm?" said a voice, and a flour-covered face came up, like a pantomime trick.

"Open the door for these ladies, and see them out."

"There's no necessity, M'm," said Mrs. Nobb. "The pleasure is to get away from the presence of obnoxious society. I wish you good-morning, M'm, only remarking that if I have left my sausage-roll it is not out of any dislike, for it began good, but the air in which that woman lives and moves is a disgrace to creation and a discredit to her sex."

With which climax Mrs. Nobb, courtesying to the shop-keeper, went out. Her step showed some elation, and she was not long in reaching her own street. But she had not arrived at her door when she perceived a small crowd around it. The gathering was chiefly composed of boys, but three or four ill-favored louts of seventeen or eighteen were there, and seemed to be inciting their younger companions to some act of vengeance.

Mrs. Nobb dashed through the crowd and into her shop, where she was confronted by her debtor and neighbor, a tall, powerful, slatternly woman, who held a cane in her hand.

"Ah, Mrs. Nobb, I'm glad you've come back. But you'll find I've done my duty by you as friend and neighbor, and will again, please God, whenever required at my hands. I've saved your goods, M'm, and the sooner that young limb of the devil is handed to the police the better, Mrs. Nobb."

The person thus charitably described was the last of the series of girls recommended to Mrs. Nobb by an affectionate parish. The young person was crouching down in a corner, howling dismally.

"What's she crying for?" was kind Mrs. Nobb's first question.

"Crying you said, I think," said the avenging neighbor, brandishing the cane. "If I were mistress here I'd give her something to cry for; but there's not a tear on them brazen, dirty, insolent cheeks. She's only owling with rage."

"I'll learn you to hit my brother!" yelped the alleged delinquent.

"Your brother! I dare say," replied the avenger. "I'd brother you, my girl, if I had you in a back-yard with this cane for five minutes. You wouldn't be in a hurry to call in all the street blackguards to steal pears after that, I promise you."

The door was open, and the mob heard this unfavorable sketch of its character. Three or four impudent lads came, warily, upon the steps, but would not venture farther. Two or three cried:

"Shame! You let her alone, will yer?"

The avenging curator of Mrs. Nobb's property made a rush at the speakers, and they darted back in dismay, but only to collect in groups and prepare for fresh demonstrations.

"I've marked some of their hides, Mrs. Nobb, and if they ever washed themselves they wouldn't wash off those marks to-night. Lucky I came in when I did. You had not been gone five minutes. I put on my bonnet, and locked my door, and I saw five or six of them young thieves marching in as if they were young noblemen coming to buy pine-apples for the Queen. I only turned back to borrow this of Jim East, as happened to be using it on his own boy at the minute, and in I came among 'em. And there was that precious girl, as is owling in hypocrisy, for I never touched her, handing over pears to one and another, and them calling her miss, mocking politeness like. I polited 'em, and polished 'em too, and I hope they like it."

"I always hate a disturbance," said Mrs. Nobb, "and I'd sooner lose a few pears than have a row, and stones through my window after dark—that's their way. If it had been your own shop, Mrs. Jarvis, you wouldn't have been so violent."

"She hit my little brother as had a penny and come to spend it," yowled the parochial young lady.

"May be so, but I hit a lot as were not your little brothers, and having no pennies could not come to spend any, you young cat. What do you say about your mistress's goods, you little fagot?"

"It were only two or three rotted pears, if you'll believe *me*, mum," said the accused, looking dismally at Mrs. Nobb.

"But she won't believe you," said the avenger, "because I saw better, and I'm ready to swear to it, and now I'm going for a policeman. Tell your story about your rotten little brother—I mean your little brother and your rotten pears—to the beak."

"Mercy, mum, mercy!" observed rather than exclaimed the small sinner, who knew perfectly well that she was in no danger.

"You won't give my servant in charge without my leave, Mrs. Jarvis."

"Oh, very well, mum; I'm sure I thought I was acting the best for you, but one never knows whether one's obliging a party or not."

"I asked you to mind my shop, Mrs. Jarvis, not to lick boys."

"Oh, very well, mum. This is gratitude from a person one has tried to serve."

This was hard on Mrs. Nobb. It was the

second time within an hour that she had been unjustly reproached with ingratitude, and she fairly lost her temper.

"Perhaps, if you'd be so good as to go back to your home, from which I'm sorry I asked you to stir, Mrs. Jarvis, we should get rid of that mob, which is keeping customers out of the shop."

The mob seemed to feel hurt that it received no more attention, and again gathered toward the steps, and again was heard the cry of "Shame!"

They had better have been silent. Mrs. Jarvis snatched up her cane, and as three bounds of Risinghame's noble charger brought him from the church door to the side of Wyclif, whom he immediately slew, three strides of Mrs. Jarvis's long legs brought her from the shop door to the side of a long lout of eighteen, who was egging on his fellows. Sharp and bitter came the slash across the evil lout's face, and before the yell of pain which the coward set up had ceased there was a long livid line over his ill-favored features. He fell back, howling and crying, after the manner of the savage cowardly gang of whom he was a type, and on whom no agency which has yet been invented, save the bitter blow, has the least effect. Then did Mrs. Jarvis, in her wrath, turn upon the other rioters, and made such havoc and such hew with her rapid cane that the mob was completely routed by the charge of one determined woman. The amount of howl which that heroine got in two minutes out of that gang could only be realized by those who happen, in the course of their London pilgrimage, to have witnessed the scene when an angry woman takes a case into her own hands.

Mrs. Nobb was gratified neither as a lover of justice nor as a plundered housekeeper. She was not of a vengeful nature, and she knew that the malice of the street would be wreaked upon her at some time when she should not be able to defend herself. And while Mrs. Jarvis was raging like Joan of Arc, and demolishing the unrighteous with sore strokes, Mrs. Nobb had no more spirit left than to say aloud:

"Drat the woman! I'd sooner the children had all the pears in the shop."

"Mu—u—uther!" exclaimed Gracie, entering upon the premises. "Got up in glory too. What have you been doing?"

"O Lord, Jenny, my dear," gasped her parent, "the world's at an end. But I've given somebody a piece of my mind for speaking to an honest woman's daughter."

"Oh, bother, mother—you've spoiled some fun. Come up stairs, you old thing, and let's have it out."

CHAPTER XVII.

ANTENUPTIAL.

While others were busy, in their degrees and with more or less earnestness, in the affairs of Ernest Dormer and Magdalen Conway, those persons, unconscious, of course, of the interest which their respective friends and enemies displayed in reference to the approaching marriage, were taking more serious thought for themselves and for their future.

Enough has been said of Magdalen's self-communings to make it clear that in the ordinary sense of the word the union which was meditated was no love-match. But, except in romance, there are not many love-matches. It is only the brevet of convention which gives that rank to the thousand desirable and fortunate marriages of which the lady relatives and friends of the parties habitually speak in terms which, if strictly construed, would justify the belief that were the affair broken off the coroner and the convent would have to give an account of the broken-hearted pair. Young English people are very rational, and therefore middle-aged English people are reasonably happy, and old English people are tolerably content. Most marriages among the upper middle-class are as much controlled by circumstances, prudently considered, as lines of poetry are by their rhymes. It is to our credit that this is so. Marmaduke greatly admires Isabel's eyes and her pleasant voice, and should they marry he would make her a capital husband, neither bringing tears into her pretty eyes nor sadness into her sweet voice, but he will not marry her, for he has aristocratic connections, and he has seen something of her vulgar family. Leonora has been much pleased with Harold's smartness and sparkle, and believes that there is something much better in him than either, and should they marry she would make him a charming wife, and never snub him when he endeavored to be lively at home, but she will not marry him, for one young man is not so much better than another as to make it worth her while to engage in a life-long quarrel with a set of venomous old sisters, who think that Harold ought to keep single and support them. But if Isabel's family went to Australia, and Harold's sisters were where venomous old folks go, and the two matches were arranged, we know what we should hear. "My dear, they are perfectly wrapped up in one another. I suppose we have all been foolish in our time, but I never saw any thing like such devotion." And why should not such things be said? At least they recognize a something which ought to exist, and therefore are akin to certain other standards which we agree, especially on Sundays, to declare our own rule of life.

But Magdalen is going to marry Ernest, and therefore it is due to her to make a quiet protest against her being accused of being less in love with her affianced husband than is the case with the majority of our modest and affectionate young women. Magdalen likes him very much, is assured by him that he loves her, she has given her word, and her parents approve. Accident, as usual, introduced the young couple, circumstances exerted a benevolent influence, and as has been before asked, why should not the marriage be a happy one? At all events,

the experiment is to be tried, and thousands of similar experiments result in producing that average of happiness which is found in English domestic life.

The absence of what is called romance—the word is used, young ladies, of course only for the sake of convenience, and not from any inability to appreciate the ideal—had one beneficial effect, if those who are at present in love will consider it so. Both Magdalen and Ernest were spared lovers' quarrels, and the disquietudes which lead to those demonstrations, or which are unwholesomely suppressed. Whatever cares Magdalen might feel in connection with the intended union arose from herself and certain principles of her own—it had nothing to do with Ernest Dormer. Of his history she knew very little, of his inner nature nothing at all, but he was externally all that a well brought-up young lady could desire—tender, attentive, respectful, but ready at a second's notice, and at fitting time and place, with at least as much demonstration as was becoming. He showed perfect tact, he never said or did aught to bring a mirthful eye upon his *fiancée*, but he made her constantly conscious of his devotion. It may be, even, that could a stranger and a man of the world have observed Dormer's courtship, that inspector would perhaps have privately regarded Ernest as somewhat in excess with his sedulousness to please, and in a man-of-the-worldly spirit would have drawn certain inferences to which it is not necessary to advert, as these lights and shades are for the initiate only, and the initiate hold their tongues. But Magdalen could see nothing except a lover whose sole thought seemed to be that he might appreciate her lightest word, forestall her slightest wish, and convince her how worthy he was of her love. And as for Ernest Dormer, when he was in Magdalen's presence he could not but be charmed with her grace, intellect, and simplicity, and when he was not in her presence—and he had to be in town a good deal before the marriage—he could never think of her without admiration, and let it be hoped that he thought of her as much as he should have done, and also in the way he should have done. They had therefore no opportunities for any little jealousies or misunderstandings, it was foreign to Magdalen's nature to create any thing of the kind, and it will easily be understood that Ernest was not likely to ruffle the still lake of happiness.

Therefore, without venturing prematurely into the inner circle of the nature of either of the lovers, we announce that they are preparing for their marriage, and that friends on each side are fulfilling their portion of the arrangements. Mrs. Conway is very happy indeed. She has superintended the alterations which it was thought necessary to make in the house at Naybury, and having at length got rid of bricklayers and carpenters, is engaged in furnishing the pretty suit of rooms destined for Magdalen and her husband. When one's mother-in-law does like you, she likes you with all her might, and rejoices to renew, for your sake, her motherly and silent thoughtfulness. Mrs. Conway determined that Ernest should be as happy as she could make him, and she called in her William's counsel to devise all sorts of contrivances for Dormer's comfort and convenience. The retired architect, after a few sniffs and shrugs at having to stoop to details somewhat beneath the dignity of his haughty vocation, broke into a genial laugh at some of the tiny devices which he was required to suggest, and then threw himself heart and soul into the work, and perfectly astounded the workmen with the fertility of his resources and the clearness with which he taught them their own trade. It was a sort of diploma in the after-days for a Naybury artisan to be able to say that he had worked under Mr. Conway's eye. Specially, as Ernest Dormer was a sort of author, the Conways made for him the most delightful library, on the first-floor and looking out upon the greenery of the garden, and Mr. Conway's skill in devising doors that should exclude all noise (Mrs. Conway reminded him that there might, at some time, be various noises in the mansion, and Mr. Conway pretended dismay), and windows that would let in the best light, book-cases that should hold all sorts of volumes, and closets that should enable the apartment to be kept neat, was exerted with remarkable effect. Then he plundered his own book-room, and placed a choice collection of books in the chamber of his intended son-in-law, carefully omitting most of the volumes of which it is said that no gentleman's library can be complete without them. Mrs. Conway saw to the other furniture, and especially to an easy-chair, so luxurious that only a tender mother could believe it possible for a man to sit in it and work, and to a lamp so beautiful that it seemed a delight to be one of its slaves.

"Ernest said that he had rather a pleasant working-room, William; but I don't think that he will complain of the change," observed Mrs. Conway one day, when she had set flowers about the new library, and was casting a vigilant eye around to spy whether any addition to the prettiness of the room were possible.

"This is not the sort of room to work in," said Mr. Conway, by way of revenging himself for having done all in his power to make it delightful. "Some bare walls, with a few maps, an old table for your reference books, and a wooden chair as hard as you can buy him, and then a fellow gets to work in earnest. He'll lounge here, and smoke, and talk to his wife, and you will order them up lunch that the engrossed student may not be disturbed in his meditations."

"Well, dear, they will be happy in their own way, and that is the only way to be happy in this world."

"I know nothing about that. It was never permitted to me."

"And you are an old story-teller. There is not a happier old man in England, except when you begin to imagine troubles and grievances."

"Not much need of the Productive Logos for that," murmured Mr. Conway; but as his wife heard two words which he knew she did not understand, she wisely opined that the remark required no answer from her. The next speech she heard was more to the purpose.

"Oh, what a darling room!"

So spoke Magdalen, clapping her hands as she entered.

"Does it please you, miss?" said her father, gazing affectionately at the beautiful girl.

"It is perfect, papa; and you are forgiven for not allowing me to see it until now, and there is a sign that you are forgiven," she added, kissing him. "And don't you be jealous, dear," she said, clasping her mother round the shoulders, and repeating the ceremony. "I see your hand every where, flowers and all. How you have both been thinking about him!"

"Well, I hope he will like it," said Mr. Conway.

"Why, papa, you speak as if it were possible that he should not. If he likes it only a quarter as much as I do, you will never get him out of it. And books, too! Have you been buying them? Here are some I never saw before."

"No, I have bought none lately," said Mr. Conway. "I have looked out a few which I had stored away, as not likely to be much appreciated by my neighbors here, except perhaps the Rector of Saxbury."

"I should not think much of books that he would like," said Mrs. Conway, who was a very womanly woman, be it said to her credit.

"Oh! but he is a learned man, mamma, whether we like him or not."

"May be so, my dear. But I should not set him to choose a library for me."

"The books are very choice, my dear Mary," said Mr. Conway, smiling.

"And they are all right, William dear, I know that, and I don't want Mr. Grafton's approbation of them."

And if you like Mary Conway, or any other woman, the less for a little feminine spirt like that, please to shut up this book, and send for a goody-goody novel, of genteel but Christian principles, and be told to eschew little sins, and never to allow even a justifiable dislike for a person's character to permit you to do injustice to his attainments. We apologize for our inability to introduce you to any thing but flesh and blood.

"Mamma," exclaimed Magdalen, after an admiring examination of the room, "where did you get that stained glass over the windows?"

"Do you like it?"

"More than like it, dear," said Magdalen, gravely.

"Yes," said Mr. Conway, as he heard the tone in which his child spoke. The word was addressed to himself. He had a habit of replying in this way—of acknowledging something which he had not said, but had thought. It sounded oddly to commonplace persons, and they avenged themselves, after their fashion, for being puzzled, by saying that he was a little cracked. It might not be amiss for a philosopher to select friends, as we do china, on the ground of that assertion. The chances are that he would get valuable specimens.

Magdalen understood her father.

"Yes, papa," she repeated, gently.

"Mamma ordered the glass, my dear," he said, taking down an Elzevir Plautus, and removing some specks from the vellum binding.

"But mamma has no other merit in the matter," said Mrs. Conway, unconscious of the underplay. "The pattern, or whatever you call it, was the one you brought from Wales, dear, and seemed to admire so much."

"And is it not beautiful? I declare that this glass is quite as beautiful as the original from which I sketched it."

"In a private chapel, I think, Magdalen," said her father.

"Yes, dear, Mr. Haslop's chapel; or, to speak more properly, the chapel Mr. Haslop built."

"Speaking as an architect, I only mean that I should not have chosen a chapel-window design for a domestic library," said Mr. Conway, "any more than I should take this Plautus to church instead of a Prayer-book. But as you are pleased, my love, we will let architecture take its chance."

"Now is not that like your papa?" said Mrs. Conway, a little vexed. "After working for weeks, and so hard, to make the room all that it should be, he wants to set you against it."

"He means nothing of the kind, mamma dear. He knows that you could not have pleased us so much as by giving us those windows. You do know that, papa?"

"I do know it," said Mr. Conway, replacing the book, like a true lover of books, that is, carefully holding up the stamped leather of the shelf, inserting the volume tenderly, and gently dressing the row into a perfect level. "And I do not care what Naybury critics may say about that solecism."

Mrs. Conway, interested in all that concerned the room, looked about for the article he had last mentioned, but not being able to assure herself that she saw it met the situation neatly.

"I should think not. Critics in Naybury indeed! I don't believe that three people in Naybury knew the style of their own church until your papa explained it to them, and if he had said that it was horizontal instead of perpendicular they would have known no better. Don't laugh at me, Mrs. Dormer, if you please—you see I know something," added Mrs. Conway, herself laughing.

"Those are remains of the wise words mamma got up when she was courting me, my dear," said Mr. Conway. "And now, young lady, you may be supposed to know a certain gentleman's tastes better than we can do. Is there any thing else that occurs to you, and can this room or any of the rooms be improved for you?

Speak now, or forever hereafter hold your peace, to quote words which you may hear again one of these days."

"I can see nothing to alter, nothing to improve, papa dear. I only wish that Ernest were here to thank you."

"We will have no thanks, darling. We owe him some consideration for his giving up London life and society to come and settle in this dull town."

"Indeed!" said Magdalen, drawing herself up with the prettiest affectation of wounded dignity.

"Oh, a million pardons," said her father, laughing. "I don't say that he is not to be rewarded. But after all, and making full allowance for the reward, it was very kindly and gracefully done, that assent to live here, without even making a condition."

"I have no patience with you, William," said Mrs. Conway.

"Certainly not, Mary," replied Mr. Conway, placidly. "But why advance that indisputable proposition?"

"I mean that I hope you will not begin to put into Ernest's head that he is making a magnificent sacrifice. Every thing in the world that he can desire, and a good little wife into the bargain, and he is to be pitied, forsooth, because he comes out of dirty, smoky London to live a healthy and happy life in a country house. He ought to be very grateful, dear fellow! and what is more, I believe that he is."

"And I am sure of it," said Magdalen, "for he has told me so."

"That settles the question," said Mr. Conway. "And have you and he and your bellicose mamma there settled another question? Who is to perform the ceremonial? Mumble Plum?"

"How can we help it, William?"

"Well, I don't know, unless you like to take a secular view of the matter, and be united at the hymeneal desk of my little friend the registrar of births, deaths, and marriages."

Magdalen's serious look at her father was understood by him, but not by her mother, who merely saw a girl's expression of distaste at the idea of not being married in church.

"Of course that is impossible," continued Mr. Conway. "Mrs. Bulliman would be down upon us at the head of her regiment of Dorcasians, and sweep us into church. And one would not wound the feelings even of Mumble Plum. But I suppose he will be assisted by somebody else?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Conway. "It is not as if we were going to have a great wedding. I shall try to be as quiet as we can."

"Consistently with covers laid for five-and-twenty," said Mr. Conway.

"My dear William, we ask nobody whom we could at all leave out; and as it is, I know that we shall give offense, but the room will not hold more, and there's an end of it."

"And that explains the quietness," said Mr. Conway. "But I did not want to be quiet. We don't have a wedding in the family every day, and if you had only proposed a pavilion in the garden and a breakfast and servants from London, I should have been delighted."

"You have taken good care not to say so," said Mrs. Conway, laughing, "until you know it is too late for any thing of the sort. No, we must keep to our humble twenty-five, or perhaps two or three more. Ernest does not ask many."

"How many?"

"Only five, papa. His uncle and aunt, the Stepneys, you know, Mr. Mangles, the literary gentleman with whom he is connected, and two other friends."

"I want to meet Mr. Mangles. I shall try to give him a few lights, of which he or his architectural writers are terribly in need. And the odd twenty are attached and devoted friends of our own. How rich we are! Mamma and your aged sire, and the bride, three, and the parson, four, and my lawyer, five—now for the remaining fifteen?"

"Papa pretended not to care any thing about it," said Mrs. Conway, "and now I will wager that he wants to know the dresses of the bridemaids."

"He deserves to know every thing," said Magdalen, "and he shall. Count, papa. There are four bridemaids. I will tell you their names presently."

"Eleven left. Now for the All Naybury Eleven!"

"Don't laugh. Mr. and Mrs. Bulliman."

"I certainly see nothing to laugh at yet."

"Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw."

"Highly approved. I love Mrs. Fanshaw. When she doesn't understand any thing, which is frequently, she asks, not because she wants to know, but because she thinks you would like to tell her, and that is altogether a nobler motive. Let her sit by me."

"That can't be, William. Leave all that to us. Go on, dear, and satisfy your curious papa."

"The Archdeacon and Mrs. Lincoln."

"Highly approved. Not for themselves, for he is a bore, but you wanted an imposing presence to frown down and crush Mrs. Bulliman. Confess, Mary."

"That was not the only reason," said Mrs. Conway, smiling. "What am I saying? We don't ask people to weddings for such reasons as that. In fact it was not the reason at all."

"No? Perhaps. But then a more secular one remains, whereof more anon. If you had only wanted to suppress my dear friend Mrs. Bulliman, you could have found material nearer at hand. Old Mr. Grafton has twice the power of the Archdeacon."

"We ask him," said Mrs. Conway.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Conway, fairly and hugely astonished. "You ask the Rector of Saxbury!"

"Certainly, and his wife, and Edward Grafton, if he will come."

The way in which Mr. Conway, striding to

the window, began muttering and mumbling over scraps of Latin and Greek, and perhaps half a dozen other languages, all such fragments being expressive of wonder, and contempt, and the like, was remarkable. The litany, or commination, lasted some time, and when it seemed to be ended a few supplementary fits broke forth, and, finally, Mr. Conway completed his task in a workmanlike manner, clenching the business with a hearty laugh. His mind being thus relieved, he turned to his wife and daughter, and said, very gravely:

"Would it not be well to ask the Rector, or Edward, or both, to assist in the service?"

"Certainly not," said Mary Conway. "We may have very good reasons, dear, for wishing them to be present, or at least for inviting them—"

"I observe the distinction."

"But that is quite another thing from asking either Mr. Grafton or his son to profane a solemn matter like the marriage service read over our child. I would sooner that we had no guests at all, and that we four went into church, and saw no one but the vicar and the clerk, than that either of the Graftons should come inside the altar-rails on that day."

Magdalen had seated herself in the large chair, and was listening silently to the conversation.

"You feel as your mother does, my love?" asked Mr. Conway, very tenderly.

"Let her speak for me, papa."

"Then," said Mr. Conway, "it seems necessary that I should tell you something of which, perhaps, you would not have heard—Magdalen, at all events, should not—until some future time. I should have answered a letter which I have received, and there would have been an end for the present. But your decision to ask the Graftons, and what you, dear Mary, have just said, leave me no choice. I have a letter from Edward Grafton, asking to be allowed to assist in the service."

Magdalen looked up, with a deep flush on her fair face, but she did not speak. Mrs. Conway's heightened color simply indicated her honest anger.

"He either means an insult," she said, "or he is a contemptible creature."

"He would be the second," said Mr. Conway, quietly, "if he meant the first. But I have reason to think that we should wrong him if we believed either. Hear his letter:

"'Saxbury Rectory.

"'My dear Sir,—I am about to ask a favor at the hands of your family, and though I address myself to you as its head, I beg that my request may be submitted to Mrs. and Miss Conway.

"'Let me abstain from all references to the past, known and unknown to you, and let me say only that I bear in mind, and ever shall, great kindness received by myself, and that I accuse myself of much which it is a penance to remember, and for which it is a duty to atone.

"'How far I may ever succeed in effacing certain impressions which I would give the world to obliterate I know not, but you, and Mrs. Conway, and your daughter will but too well understand that what I am about to propose could be offered by me only under feelings which convince me that I am in solemn earnest in my endeavor to deserve other regards from you all than those which you now entertain.

"'I will not enter into unwelcome detail, but in the assurance that I shall be justly, in the hope that I shall be kindly judged, I earnestly beg that I may be honored with permission to bear a part, be it ever so slight, in the performance of the service at the marriage of Mr. Dormer with Miss Conway. I shall not be found ungrateful.

"'With the kindest and most respectful remembrances to your family, believe me,

"'My dear Sir,

"'Yours most faithfully,

"'Edward Grafton.

"'William Conway, Esq.'"

"William, I should like to answer that letter," said Mrs. Conway.

"Yes?" asked her husband, with some little surprise, for though his wife could write a good, straightforward epistle at need, it was chiefly remarkable for going direct to the point, and for not leaving out the one word, date, or figure on which the message depended. She was not fond of writing, and for what may be called the floral part of the art she had any thing but aptitude.

"Yes," she said. "I know what you mean. You think that this note, with its elaborate sentences (which I dare say he wrote nineteen times over before he pleased himself), requires an elaborate answer, just such a one as you would like to compose. But I should prefer to give him a piece of my mind."

"I have no doubt of it. But before we settle that, let me ask you whether there is not some inconsistency in your conduct, my dear? If it was worth while to seek to please the Graftons by asking them to our wedding, is it worth while to affront and enrage them by the very uncompromising dispatch of which I see you are mentally arranging the opening slash?"

"I don't believe that his father and mother know that he has made the request."

"They will know that he has had a letter from you which makes it impossible for him to come to the breakfast."

"But I don't know that it will. If there is any good feeling left in him he will humble himself, and come to show that he is sensible of the rebuke."

"Mary," said Mr. Conway, smiling, "you convince me that you have some mystic reasons for wishing the Graftons here, and that you do not ask them out of mere respect for clergymen and neighbors. I don't want to pry into your secrets."

"They are mostly very harmless ones, dear."

"Yes. But unless you have a very strong desire to answer this young man, it really seems to me that the reply should come from the person to whom the note is addressed."

"It is addressed to us all."

"I lower my arms. Have your own way, as usual."

"As if I ever got it! But I do wish to write."

"And refuse, of course?"

"Of course."

"And accept, dear mamma," said Magdalen, joining for the first time in the conversation, and speaking in a pleading voice.

"Magdalen! Accept? *You* wish Edward Grafton to assist at your marriage?"

"Yes, mamma, if it will not be very unpleasant to you."

"My dearest child, you can be in no doubt about that, after what you have heard me say just now. I can not in the least understand what you mean by wishing such a thing. Can you, papa?"

"Perhaps I have a glimpse of Maggie's meaning," said Mr. Conway, "but I am sure she prefers to explain it herself."

"Would mamma say why she so much objects to Edward Grafton's assisting?"

"Why, my dear, of course I will. But you know why. I think that he is a bad kind of man. I think that he is revengeful and mean, and I am not telling you any news, Magdalen, in saying that he has spoken of Ernest in a way that I would never have forgiven had such things been said of your papa in my young days."

"I know all that, mamma, and even more. I would not vex you at the time by repeating to you what Edward Grafton said about Ernest to me one day, when we met at one of the cottages, but I may tell you now. He told me his ill opinion of Ernest, and dared to warn me against marrying him."

"I always hated your going to those cottages," said Mrs. Conway, sharply.

Of course that was not all the answer which she wanted to make, and she had a great mind to scold Magdalen well for having kept this secret, but the truth was that she loved Maggie so very heartily that she forced herself to talk nonsense, which she knew to be nonsense, rather than say what would have brought tears to Magdalen's eyes. Perhaps many a mother has submitted to this kind of self-humiliation out of her dear love for her child, and has never had credit for it. But in this case forbearance was rewarded, for Magdalen immediately threw her arms round her mother's neck, and, kissing her passionately, said:

"Don't, you dearest. Don't keep it back. Scold me, if you like. But indeed I did not mean to give you pain."

"I know that, love," said her mother, returning the kiss, and wiping her eyes. "But if you *had* told me he should never have had a chance of writing such a letter as that."

"Then you forgive me?"

"Why, I was never angry with you, dearest."

"Don't tell a story, dear," whispered Magdalen, playfully. "You were angry, just for a moment, and I deserved it. But you will show that you have forgiven me by telling Edward Grafton that he may come as he wishes."

"I can not understand you, Magdalen," said her mother, "and it is of no use my saying the same thing over again. What *do* you mean by wishing to invite the man who has insulted both you and your intended husband?"

"He has done both, mamma. He confesses that he has behaved ill, and that he repents it, and he has to make compensation by doing what —what," she said, smiling but coloring, "we all know must be very painful to him. It is our duty not to refuse to let him make amends."

These last words were said with a delightful seriousness, and they seemed rather like some one else's language than the speaker's.

"That is some of the Catholic nons—well, doctrine you learned in Wales, Magdalen," said her mother, "and it is one of the regrets of my life that you ever went there—not that you caused it, dear, for it was my fault for sending you. But I did not think that you would have remembered that sort of thing upon so serious an occasion as your marriage."

"Viewed as she views it," said Mr. Conway, gravely, "no time could be so fit for remembering it, mamma."

"Come, William," said Mrs. Conway, who was slightly disturbed, and not unreasonably felt that she had a right to make her husband share the disturbance, "that *is* nonsense from you. I would not use the word to Maggie, because she is in earnest, and I am sorry for it; but for you to begin preaching compensation and forgiveness as a Christian duty is a little too good. Nobody turns up their nose at such talk more than you do."

He was too good a husband and too gallant a gentleman not to receive the fire with perfect good humor.

"Dear Mary, I am the last person to preach, and I would never even hear preaching if you did not take me to church. I only want you to be just to Magdalen."

"Am I in the habit of being unjust to her?"

"No, mamma," answered the girl. "But I think that just now you are inclined to be ever so little unjust to papa, who only spoke in kindness."

"I know that, too," said Mrs. Conway, whose burst of quick temper was over in a moment, and whose kindly nature at once began to make her angry with herself. "Papa don't mind what I say, an old heathen, nor do you either, miss. And if you both join against me in this matter of course I must give way."

"Not against you, but with you, dear," said Magdalen, "for I am quite sure that you understand me, and why I think it ought to be."

"I won't be coaxed," said Mary Conway, who liked nothing better in the world. "I give in, and there is an end, unless your father has any thing to say, as becomes the head of the family,

as Mr. Edward Grafton is good enough to call him. A pretty family it would be if there were no better head," she added, saucily. "Can't you speak, head of the family?"

"I think," said Mr. Conway, "that it is a matter in which Magdalen may reasonably be allowed to have her own way. I do not care in the least about Edward Grafton, and if Magdalen had told me of his conduct to her I should have gone over to Saxbury and given that young priest an old man's mind, not perhaps in the style that you, Mary, were about to adopt, but still with sufficing emphasis."

"Yes, you can say bitter things when you like, and you put them in a way that makes them remembered."

"You have none to remember, at any rate."

"Perhaps."

"None, I say, and you know it. But I have two things to observe to you. As to the having Edward Grafton, after his insolence, I must say, my dear Magdalen, with all deference—nay, we will call it reverence, for the convictions that make you urge it, the concession is really so very —well, so outrageously amiable that one hardly knows how to speak of it. You know that though I have my own ideas, I never undervalued Christian teaching, and I don't deny that, logically, I am nowhere if you plead certain rules of conduct. But we live in the world, and it is the nineteenth century, and if a man strikes you on one cheek, we find on the whole it rather answers better to return the compliment than to offer him the other. Don't you think that we had better set no example of preternatural piety—it might make people talk, and perhaps laugh?"

"Papa, you must not be angry."

"Do I speak as if it were likely, Miss Goneril Regan Conway?"

"If you do not wish what I wish, I ask you to say that it shall not be, and your command finishes every thing. But please do not ask me —you know I can't mean any thing disrespectful—please don't ask me to yield to such reasons as you have been giving. I am sure you are not serious in that."

"If you understand me, my dear, I think you will own that I have given you a hint at some good worldly reasons for not being so exceedingly forgiving. But," he added, his better nature and his clear intellect coming up in Magdalen's aid, "I don't care for the world or for what any one may say. There. If you, dear child, would be made happier by this curious concession, and your mother assents, Edward Grafton shall come, if all Naybury laughs. And perhaps"—here the man's cowardice came back again—"there are not many people who know that we ought to hate him."

"Some do," said Mrs. Conway, coloring.

"I see," said her husband, laughing. "We have talked. Never mind. The risk shall be run. But I told you I had another thing to say. There is one person who ought to be consulted in this, and who certainly ought not to be married by a man whom he would probably kick were Grafton not in orders."

"I am sure of Ernest's approval," said Magdalen. And she looked like one who might be pretty sure that any thing she desired would be granted by a lover.

"I dare say, Pride and Arrogance," said her father, smiling. "But this is rather a man's question, after all, dear girl. You will be placing Ernest in a false position by calling in a person who has done him wrong. Come, you must consider that, Maggie. There is no hurry about answering the letter—he ought to be thankful if it is answered at all. The only condition we'll make with you, pet, is that you obtain Ernest Dormer's assent That is surely right, mamma."

"Surely," said Mrs. Conway. "The only thing is— Oh, I wish you had not these views, Magdalen," she added, in vexation.

"We won't reopen that question," said Mr. Conway.

"No. But what I mean is this. Magdalen can not ask Ernest's consent without telling him every jot and tittle of Edward Grafton's conduct—"

"I have done so already, mamma. Was it not my duty?"

"And how did he receive it?" asked the mother.

"He used language so like papa's that it is quite curious."

"Not so curious, dear," said Mr. Conway, "because there is but one way of looking at such things. He said, I suppose, that he was sorry Mr. Grafton was a clergyman, because it is hardly the thing, except in extraordinary circumstances, to chastise a clergyman personally, but that he would take care to punish him somehow."

"He did not use the threat. I think Ernest never threatens. But I was afraid that he meant vengeance. He does not mean it now."

"What, child? Have you converted Ernest Dormer to your doctrines of charity and forgiveness?"

"I hope," said Magdalen, simply, "that he sees many things as I do."

"I have no more to say," said her father, gravely. "You are bound, dear, to ask the question of Ernest. When you have his reply, I will write what you may dictate."

"Then I will go and write to him at once," said Magdalen, "and tell him all about this lovely room, and the pains you have taken with it, and the conviction you both have that he will write something here so wonderful that people will come from all parts to look at the house that holds the great author."

Her merry laugh lingered on their loving ears for a moment after she had vanished.

"Why do you look so grave, William?"

"Does nothing occur to you after what she last said? I don't mean the fun, but what she said as to his seeing things as she does?"

"Yes, it occurs to me that he is desperately in love. Is there any thing wonderful in that,

or terrible? What troubles you now, my dear old croak?"

"There is nothing wonderful in his loving that darling. But when a man of the world suddenly abandons the world's habits of thought, and gets to forgiving enemies and foregoing his right to punish them, one of two cases seems to arise."

"Well?"

"He is either a fool or a hypocrite."

"There you go. If it is possible to find a wrong in the pleasantest and most natural thing, my dear old William is the person to do it. Fool we know Ernest Dormer is not. Hypocrite, perhaps, in the sense in which all men are hypocrites when they are in love, and when they are ready to give up all their own ideas and feelings to please somebody else. I don't say that you ever did—you never loved me well enough. But I can quite understand Ernest doing so, or pretending to do so, in answer, I dare say, to a very sweet letter in which she laid her heart before him, and showed him how earnest she was in wishing him to forgive. He has not forgiven Edward a bit—I should despise him if he had—but his first duty was to make Maggie happy. What do you know about love and lovers, dear?"

"More than you think. Enough to be quite ready to trust in your womanly instinct in such matters rather than to my own judgment."

"That's not so badly said, William."

"But just bear with me, dear, while I put one thought before you."

"I had rather not, if it is another miserable view."

"Listen. Ernest Dormer has been singularly ready to consent to all and every thing that we wished. He consented to live at Naybury. He has assented to every proposition of our lawyer. He has given up the continental marriage tour, and will go to the Highlands. Nothing that he does not agree to."

"Nothing, and he is a dear fellow."

"I like him much, and I can understand your liking him to excess. But this wonderful willingness to do all we ask, to exert no will of his own—"

"Because he loves your child so much. You love her, too, and it is very odd that you can not comprehend her fascination for him."

"He is not very young."

"What are you driving at, William? Speak out, that I may knock down another of your brain-spiders and scrunch it."

"Mary, if that man has made the girl believe that he shares her views he is an accomplished hypocrite, and his object is to have this marriage carried out at any price."

"I do not think," said Mrs. Conway, much hurt, "that I ever knew you so cruelly unjust. How can you talk so of a man to whom we are going to give all we love in the world?"

And she hastily left the room, with tears in her eyes.

"I may be a fool," said Mr. Conway. "I hope I am."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. MANGLES'S REPORT.

THERE was great and high debate in the tobacco-parliament of the Octagon.

"Saw the marriage in the *Times* this morning?" asked Jimmy Rydon, not of any body in particular, for he was squinting with both eyes at the fire in his meerschaum, but he knew that he was pretty sure of an answer from somebody.

"Yes," said Tom Alford, and I thought they might as well have borrowed a word from the list above, and said 'prematurely.'"

"What for?" said somebody.

"Why, the united ages can't make thirty-eight," said Alford.

"Tom, have you been dining?" asked Marsden.

"Course I have, and very badly. I have backed my bill, and if the committee don't attend to me there'll be a row."

"All right," said Marsden, "but you needn't talk nonsense. If the united ages can't make thirty-eight, the bride must be under six years old, for Dormer is thirty-two."

"Oh, Dormer!" said Tom Alford.

"He never knows any thing," remarked Henry Milwarden, "but he gets on so well without knowing any thing that it would be a folly in him to be wise."

"I meant little Hugh Bristow's marriage," said Tom Alford, placidly.

"Who cares about little Hugh Bristow? He said he was off into the country, and he had a shiny black sort of pocket by his side. I thought the holidays were over, and he was going back to Uppingham. The idea of that brat marrying," said Rydon. "But I meant Ernest Dormer, of course, as would have occurred to any body but Tom Alford."

"Yes, Dormer is married," said Henry Wigram, sententiously.

"Well! I hope he'll be happy," said Doddy Dalston.

"And it's very kind in you, Doddy," said Milwarden. "And if ever you marry, and I hear of it, I will say the same about you."

"I see," said Dick Marsden, "that, as usual, one parson was not strong enough for the work, and that he was 'assisted.'"

"Yes," said Wigram, "and did you notice by whom?"

"Don't think I did, particularly."

"Why, by that man who dined with us here, and got so blessed buffy that he talked about his children's souls."

"That man Grafton!" said two or three.

"That identical and idiotic individual," said Wigram.

"He is not an idiot," said Charley Launceston, quickly, "nor in the least like one. He may be a great deal worse, but he's not that. Milwarden does not think him an idiot, I'll bet."

"No, by Jove!" said the young barrister. "That outburst of his, which gave Tom Alford, for the first time, a notion that some people be-

lieve they have souls, need not count. It was only a speech out of place. But I had the honor of sitting near that gentleman during part of the evening, and I can tell you that I know him to be a very clever fellow, and I believe him to be any thing but a good one."

"I am awfully astonished at his assisting at the wedding," said Wigram, "after what I heard you tell Mangles, Charley."

"Well, you see," said Mr. Launceston, "Mangles knows what he is about, and all that. I infer that he used his discretion, and not his tongue. Besides, there may be family reasons —But here's the great Samuel himself—we'll hear what he has to say."

"Get into the box, Samuel Mangles, take the book in your right hand, and swear," said Milwarden, making a place for the chair which Mr. Mangles drew between the speaker and Charles Launceston. "And now tell us. Were you at the Dormer-cum-Conway wedding?"

"I were."

"Well, and how did it go off? Use your own language, my good man, if you think you can make yourself better understood by the jury."

"One would think that you had no briefs by your incessantly talking shop, Henry, but as the papers show that many clients have the misfortune to employ you, I think you might leave off advertising your trade," said Mangles. He said this sort of thing in such a pleasant, fatherly way, half laughing, that offense would have been out of the question, even if an Octagon man, of that clique, had not been far too good a fellow to resent chaff.

"Tell us about the wedding," persisted Henry Milwarden, without the least notice of his friend's advice.

"Well, what do you want to know? One wedding is a good deal like another."

"Is she nice?"

"Nice! By Jove!" said Mr. Mangles, solemnly, "Mrs. Ernest Dormer is the most charming young female I ever saw in all my life. You don't often see me in the seventh heaven about any thing. But, by Jove, *yes!*"

"Hooray!" said Milwarden, in a low voice.

"You'll never marry any thing half so delightful, I can tell you," said Mr. Mangles. "You wouldn't understand her, you wouldn't appreciate her."

"Strong-minded, eh?" said Milwarden. "Dormer is welcome to her, for me."

"No, Sir, she is not strong-minded, but beautiful-minded, if you comprehend that, only you don't. I sha'n't talk about her any more, except to tell you once for all that Ernest Dormer is a most lucky party."

"A most lucky party," echoed Henry Wigram, with something significant in the echo.

"Most," returned Mangles, direct to Wigram, who understood the special affirmation.

"I am very glad of it," said Wigram, as earnestly. What was implied, of course, was that Mangles had satisfied himself that there was no foundation for any thing that had been whispered to him in that room, and that Wigram rejoiced in the extirpation of certain doubts.

"Here is to their healths," said Milwarden, raising a huge tumbler of iced seltzer water, slightly brandied, to his lips. "Where are they gone?"

"Into the Highlands, to some place near Loch Ness, lent to them by a friend of the old people."

"Old people nice?"

"Out and out. Mr. Conway is a very remarkable person, learned to excess, and full of something better than learning."

"You should introduce Tom Alford to him," said Milwarden, "they would exchange wonderful observations."

"It would take a wiser man than I see in this room to exhaust Mr. Conway's conversational power," said the editor. "I only wish that I could have staid at Naybury for a week, but I had to come up by the night train."

"Naybury's a beastly place," said Rydon. "I was through it once, and a horse came down with me on the infernal hill, which I suppose they haven't taken away."

"It's not worse than other country towns, and the hill is a sort of feature. The Conways have a capital house, where if Dormer is not very comfortable it will be his own fault. I could be."

"I dare say," said Launceston. "Fancy Mangles being happy in any place where he could not get the third edition of the evening papers."

"Sir," said Mangles, in Johnsonian style, "your sneer is ill-bred, and your logic is absurd. While engaged in my trade I require all its tools; when remitted to leisure I rejoice to lay them aside. Is your foolishness satisfied? Then ring the bell."

"But I say," said Launceston, "the paper says that your friend the Reverend Grafton assisted. Was that so?"

"Yes," said Mr. Mangles, dryly.

"Excuse apparent vulgarity, but if I were to apply the word rummy to that arrangement—"

"You would apply not only an apparent but a real vulgarism. Still, I was rather surprised, but I presume there were reasons. I never ask questions. The breakfast was in the best style, the speeches were in the best taste, especially one of my own, and altogether, making charitable allowance for provincial difficulties, the whole affair was highly creditable."

"Bridemaids pretty?" asked Doddy Dalston.

"What can it signify to you? Yes, no. There were four. Two very nice girls from Wales, a very pretty little person who lives near Naybury, a Miss Buxton, and an extremely plain, but I am told eminently pious personage, also a resident. The motive for that last selection was not obvious, the ugliness of the lady was—but I ought not to be ungrateful, for she was good enough to give me a tract."

"I say," said Jimmy Rydon, with real concern on his good-natured face, "you don't mean that Dormer has got in among that sort of thing?"

"Not a bit," said Mangles, hastening to relieve Mr. Rydon's mind from the apprehension that their common friend was in danger of religion. "I take it that the selection was another case of special reasons, and in the country you are obliged to do many things you don't like. Oh, not a bit. Mr. Conway is singularly without prejudices—sees all sides of matters, and therefore has no troublesome fanaticism about any side in particular, and his wife is a delightful person, a model mamma-in-law. I suspect the tract lady was out of her swim."

"Well," said Henry Milwarden, "much that you say is very consolatory, but I don't know. Of course it will be all rose-color for a bit, but I fear that after a bit poor Ernest will find it dull times."

"We can't have every thing," said Dick Marsden.

"I think," said Launceston, considerately, "that with what you describe—pleasant house, nice people, pretty wife, plenty of money—he might manage to hold on while the old folks live, and after that, if he is not acclimatized, and has not learned to talk of bullocks, he can come to town. Meantime he can run up a good deal, and come here to have his mind improved and purified.

"Come and be wound up once a fortnight, like a French clock," said Doddy.

"And you can send him books to cut up, Mangles," said Milwarden. "He can read them in a pleasant manner to his wife and his family, after a five o'clock thick tea, and the reviews will be enriched with the interesting and improving observations made during the perusals."

"Thick tea be hanged!" said Mangles, impatiently. "I tell you that it is a Christian family—not in the sense of the advertisements of house-maids who want to meet their young men *every* Sunday night—but their hours are much the same as our own, and in fact Conway is a country gentleman who happens to have a house in a country town. They lived in London for many years. I can't say whether Ernest Dormer is going to be happy or not; who can? But none of his discomforts will come out of his merely living out of London, so you may spare your obliging sympathies."

"It is a very odd thing," said Henry Wigram, "that we all address ourselves to the question whether Ernest Dormer is going to be happy. Lots of fellows of this club have married, and I don't remember that we ever took the trouble to consider their future. Some of us here are married, but if the club has sat upon them and given verdicts I know nothing about it. Isn't it curious that we raise this question, and every body discusses it with so much interest?"

"He ought to know the great concern we all feel," said Doddy.

"I don't think he would care to hear it," said Mangles.

"Ungrateful cove!" said Rydon; "but you are his friend, and ought to understand him."

"Not ungrateful; but I suspect he is not exactly the man who would be thankful to people for discussing his private affairs, especially in the compassionate sort of way which has marked the debates to-night."

"No," said Milwarden; "when you come to think of it, Dormer is not what you call a very sympathetic kind of fellow. Every body likes him. I like him very much. But I don't think he goes in for confidences and all that, and except Mangles I suppose nobody knows a great deal about his affairs. And yet, somehow, we all want this match to turn out well."

"Yes," said Henry Wigram, in a melancholy voice. "It would almost seem as if there was a notion that it might not turn out well. Such a demonstration of good wishes sounds ominous."

Mr. Mangles turned a not very friendly eye on the speaker, but did not answer him.

"I should like to see the lady," said Charles Launceston. "I suppose they will come to town some time or other."

"I hope you will," said Mangles, "and you will see something worth seeing."

"Dare say you have a photograph of her, Samuel?"

"I am so fortunate."

"Show."

"Sha'n't. I have no idea of handing the portrait of my friend's wife to be compared with likenesses of ballet-girls and that sort, which half of you have in your pockets. Besides, I haven't got it here. The better kind among you may see it at my chambers if you call at a proper time."

"When he is not conspiring with that man in black, whom I always see there, privily in their lurking dens to murder the innocent," said Henry Milwarden.

"The fellow has been to church, and listened to what he heard," said Mangles. "My dear Milwarden, what does this mean? Oh, but you went with the judges, perhaps?"

"Never mind about that. Do you just learn to infuse a little mercy into your own justice, and not treat an author as if authorship were a crime."

"It is a crime, Mr. Milwarden, in many cases, and deserves a much severer punishment than I can award—the sort of punishment that usually descends on criminals when you have defended them."

"One for you, Henry," said Tom Alford.

"What!—you see it? Then, Mangles, you have hit too hard," said Milwarden, laughing.

"You'll deserve it next time. And further, Mr. Milwarden, I would remark to you, and the like of you, who protest against the wholesome severities of criticism, that there is no true humanity in sparing a bad book. And further, again, as you have chosen to quote from the

best book, which is not a proper practice on light occasions, I will do the same, or at least I will call your attention to a strong case of anti-sentimentalism. Have you attended church long enough to have heard of St. Paul? Or, stay, in going to Guildhall, you must have seen a cathedral dedicated to a saint of that name?"

"I know of him," said Milwarden; "he was a great cricketer, stood up for the Eleven, and was bowled, and Rhoda stood at the wicket."

"One did not expect in the Octagon Club a reproduction of cuttings from the *facetiæ* of the American newspapers, Mr. Milwarden."

"Never mind about that, as I said before. I know all about St. Paul."

"In that case you may remember that on a certain occasion a viper came out of some fagots and fastened on his hand?"

"Yes, I have seen a picture of it."

"Well, what did he say of the venomous beast?"

"I don't remember that he said any thing."

"Quite right. Assuredly he did not say that though he could not approve its apparent intention to poison, he was willing to make allowance for its instincts, and would not refuse to credit it with a most lustrous skin, and with much grace of action. That would have been the sentimental style of treatment which you like. Do you know what Paul did? He shook off the venomous beast into the Fire. He took care that it should hurt neither the barbarous people nor his own educated companions. There's a text and a sermon for you, and if another person asks me for another word of wisdom to-night he won't get it."

"There's something in you, Samuel," said Milwarden, coolly, "in spite of what most people think to the contrary. See as much of me as you can, and so add knowledge of men and things to your knowledge of books, and in time you will be a credit to the club. Why did not you ask me to hand you those lights, instead of getting up?"

"*On n'est jamais mieux servi que par soi-meme*," said Mangles.

"Is his accent at all tolerable, Marsden—you have lived a deal among the natives?"

"I have heard a worse," said Dick Marsden, "your own, for instance."

"That I utterly disbelieve," said Henry Milwarden, "for I was complimented the other day by a police magistrate upon the masterly way in which I spoke Italian to an organ-boy witness, and a person who can speak Italian can speak French."

"Or people think so," said Launceston, "on the principle, I suppose, that if you quote Greek you must certainly be a tremendous swell at Latin."

"Quote some Greek, Tom Alford," said Milwarden. "Mind that the sentiments are unexceptionably moral, though, or I shall leave the room."

"Why should I do a feat for nothing?" said Tom Alford, indolently, and yet there was just a gleam of sparkle in his good eyes.

"Quite right," said the lawyer. "I'll bet you a sovereign you can't quote Greek."

"Done with you," said Alford, yawning.

"By Jupiter, he takes the bet!" said Milwarden. "The savage Orson is endowed with reason. I wonder what he's going to say—something he has heard from the Christy Minstrels."

"The bet's made, hold your row, Henry," said Doddy Dalston, who was always alive to the athletic sport of betting, "and go ahead, Thomas, my son. Mangles, be umpire. Go it Tom."

"*Zoe mou sas agapo*," said Tom Alford, as bold as brass, and speaking as correctly as a fellow of Trinity.

A great shout went up, and Milwarden's laugh was as loud as any body's as he crossed to the distinguished Grecian and put the sovereign into his hand.

"All right, old fellow," said Tom Alford, pocketing the money, "and now I've had my revenge on you for poking fun at me all night."

"I suppose that you won't tell us how you came to know those words," said Launceston; "but you might tell us whether you think they are in Homer or in Virgil."

But Tom Alford was too knowing a badger to be drawn again, and he merely responded by drinking Charley Launceston's health.

"I forget what part of the Highlands you said the Dormers were going to, Mangles," said Wigram.

"Loch Ness way," said Mangles, answering as briefly as he well could, for he had been displeased at certain words from the last speaker.

"I should also like to see Mrs. Dormer," said Henry Wigram. "You said you would show me that photograph, Mangles."

"I said I would show it to any particular friend of Dormer's who might call at my rooms," said Mangles, coldly, and somewhat modifying what he *had* said.

"Well, I suppose I may call myself that," said Henry, looking a little surprised at the tone of the other. "When can I come?"

"I am at home most mornings until three," said Mr. Mangles, and it could scarcely be called an invitation. He had taken a notion into his head, and until he could reason it out, one way or the other, he chose to place Wigram in a sort of moral quarantine.

The House then proceeded to the orders of the day, and we may leave it sitting for the good of society generally.

CHAPTER XIX.

GOLDEN EGGS.

In a small, plain, scantily-furnished room, whose newness showed that it had been an addition to the pleasant and comfortable cottage in its front, there were found one morning—some time before the marriage of Ernest and Magdalen — three persons, two of whom are

known to the reader and one is not. The two were children, the third was their mother.

The unfurnished condition of the apartment was clearly a matter of choice with its tenant. The little home to which the room was an adjunct was very pretty, with its pictures, and gay chintz, and flowers; it had been adorned by good taste, and there had been no enforced thrift in providing its furniture. It stood in a garden (rather large for a London suburb), and this was surrounded by a wall high enough to screen it from the sight of passers-by, and the gate was solid, with a tiny opening enabling the inmates of the house to receive letters and messages without necessarily admitting the bearers. These latter arrangements had been made by a previous occupant, who had his own reasons for being exclusive, and for other reasons they were acceptable to the present resident. The apartment in the rear was a sort of studio. Beyond a screen for snugness, and a table, on which were some colors and other artistic necessaries, and near which was a very high and straight-backed chair, the room held only a single note-worthy article, but this was a key to the use of the place. It was a huge book, in elephant folio, resting on an easel. It contained a large number of elaborately-drawn and exquisitely-colored plates, and they all represented varieties of eggs. It was the most approved and most costly authority that could be procured for money, and it had been a birthday present to the little lady who now sat near it.

This personage will probably make her appearance but seldom during the progress of our story, and she is introduced only because considerations, of which a narrator must be the best judge, render it necessary to illustrate the history of one of the principal characters. These words are written in no affectation of fastidiousness, for from a tale which assumes to be of real life in a given age it would be more than a folly, it would be an untruthfulness, to exclude any social fact of prominence. But it is far more pleasant to write of things and of persons of comparatively unassailable character, and the writer who needlessly intrudes what is unwelcome to the really good may pair off with him who from cowardice avoids what appears to him essential to the development of his picture.

The lady who sat near the elephant folio was young, slight, and apparently but just recovering from severe illness, which had given her complexion a delicacy that might not seem in keeping with a face that was expressive of a quaint merriment. Her dark hair, of which she had a good deal, was worn in a sort of crop round her head, and none of it came down to her shoulders. She had very large eyes, and a pretty mouth, which seemed very ready to laugh at the shortest notice. In other respects she might not have been thought very attractive by men accustomed to the glorious varieties of beauty which may be seen in English society. Probably a man who went much into drawing-rooms would not have said more of her than that she was a nice little person, and apparently very companionable. And his not over-liberal tribute would have been reasonably just. We have no new heroine to bring upon the scene in the person of one who has been two or three times named as Lucy, and who was known to her tradespeople and her very few friends as Mrs. Verner.

Quietly attired in a striped morning-dress, Mrs. Verner was quietly working away at her favorite occupation. She was painting an egg, the humble egg of the breakfast-table, or some even less honorable egg, and was making it like unto one which for their own reasons collectors much prize, and will buy at vast prices. She copied the delicate hues from her large book, and the plebeian article was gradually becoming a worthy rival of the natural production which she was imitating.

Of the two children—they were seen for a moment in Kensington Gardens—one on a low stool was studying, with frowning gravity, a toy-book, the other was dutifully waiting near the large volume, until her mother should be willing to turn over its pages, and explain its glories. The elder child beguiled her leisure by an occasional song, which she was good enough to execute in a very confidential tone, for she had been entreated to spare the nerves of a convalescent, and a more affectionate little thing could not have been found than Mopes. The Dormouse was too young to have learned that she owed the least return for the kindness of any body, and having no knowledge of such a debt, usually set at total defiance all suggestions that did not exactly meet her private views. It luckily suited her, on the present occasion, to keep obstinate silence, and gaze sternly at a picture-book which, the same morning, on its being tendered for her amusement, she had promptly consigned to her bath.

So there was stillness in the little party, and the only sounds that were heard were those of the rustling of the Dormouse's book, and the occasional plashing of the water when Mrs. Verner washed her paint-brush.

A ring at the gate-bell, and Mrs. Verner started nervously.

"Kaken, praps," exclaimed the younger child, throwing down her book, and rushing at the door with intent to satisfy her mind. But the door being closed, and her powers being inadequate to the lifting a latch by which it was fastened, the young lady instantly set up a great howl, which she suddenly subdued as Colonel Latrobe entered.

That officer was evidently a friend of the little family. In two minutes the Dormouse was transformed from a raging imp into a smiling cherub—at least in her mother's eyes, a glittering box of bonbons effecting the change. A similar present was handed to her sister, who took it with a look of quiet thanks, and immediately laid it aside. Latrobe shook hands with Mrs. Verner, and fetched himself a chair from the adjoining room.

THE EGG-FORGER.

Mrs. Verner looked at him earnestly for a moment—she flushed and trembled—and led the children from the studio.

Presently she returned, and before saying a word she carefully put away her painting materials, and closed her large book. As she did this she looked steadily at Walter Latrobe.

Very gravely, Latrobe made a gesture, meaning that she was right.

"I knew that was your errand," she said, in a sweet, sad voice.

"You knew it?"

"Yes. It would have been kinder to let me know sooner, and in another way from that in which it came to me, but never mind. Do not be afraid of a scene, Walter," she added, wiping some large tears from her beautiful eyes.

"I think you know, Lucy, that I would rather have gone on any devil's errand than come on this," he said, in an undervoice, and from between his teeth.

"You have always been very kind to me and

the children; and they are very fond of you. It was good in you to come. I expected a different sort of messenger, or a letter."

"May I ask you who has been speaking to you?"

"A woman. But you do not know her. And she only confirmed what I had been guessing at and tormenting myself about for months, and what made me so ill that at one time I believed I should need no cruel messages. But I am quite strong now. I could not die. I looked at the children and I could not die. I am quite strong, and able to hear all that you are sent to say to me."

"Strong!" said Walter, impatiently, "you are not fit—"

As he spoke a door slammed, and Lucy, alarmed, started out of her seat, and then breathed heavily and began to cry. Then she mastered herself with a great effort, and forcing a smile, which was very piteous, she said:

"That is nothing—you know I always hated a slamming door, and that was why he had that latch put on for me—it prevents the door from shutting very easily, don't you understand?"

"Don't talk against your grief, that's a dear woman," he said, very kindly. "I can see how ill you are, and I know all that you are feeling."

"You! A man. No, you are very good, Walter, but you know very little about it. But I promise not to cry any more. I know how men detest it. You may say what you are told to say. See, I am quite firm—see how steadily I can hold this water-glass."

She thought that she could, but the colored water was so shaken, as she held up the little glass in her thin fingers, that had Latrobe needed any proof of her weakness he had one. He took the glass from her.

"Why do you do this with me?" he said.

"I want you to tell him I behaved well, as as well as I could at least," she said, struggling hard to keep her promise against crying again.

"If it will please you I will tell him, tell him that you behaved nobly," said Walter Latrobe, earnestly. "But I am not come to speak of him. I do not think I ought to speak at all until you are better. See here," he went on, taking her hand as a brother might have done. "You have nothing to learn, so talking of the past would only give you needless pain. Let us have the doctors, and the fresh air, and the strength, and in the mean time let me only tell you that every thing shall be done—is done—for your comfort, and that I am your guardian and the children's. I think you can trust me and what I say. Let things be so until you are well, and then we will arrange every thing."

"Fresh air," said Lucy, who had looked up suddenly at the words, and had apparently heard nothing after them. "Then we *are* to be sent away! I thought—I hoped he would not have done that. Oh, I have been so happy here! I can not go away. I will not go away. Yes, I will, I will go directly, whenever you please. I will do whatever I am told. Please, Walter, do not say that I said I would not. I did not mean it. I was only thinking how happy I had been, and that perhaps he might have let me stay here a little while. But I am ready; I will go to-morrow—my little packing will not take much time, and then the children's things—"

It was of no use. She did her best, but her heart was too full, and she pressed her hands vehemently to her face, and wailed, rocking herself to and fro.

The soldier who had with cries and curses hurled a fierce handful of his men against outnumbering enemies, and had smitten through brow and brain till the terrified savages recoiled before the fury of that White Demon, sprang straight up and fairly rushed from the room.

It was Lucy who had to seek him. And she found him seated on a couch in her little drawing-room, pale as herself, and gazing vacantly at the window.

"Oh!" he said, starting as her hand touched his shoulder, "I am not the sort of person to come on such business. I am a fool where a woman's grief is part of it. I could tell a man that he was to be hanged in five minutes—I have done it—and thought no more about it. I am behaving execrably to you, Lucy, and I beg your pardon. I don't know how long I have been out of the room."

"Not many minutes," she said. "I broke my promise dreadfully, and you will not trust me again, but you may. Tell me about our—our going away."

"But you are not to go away," he said, with what is called an oath, but which, in his honest indignation at the thought of a cruelty, we will not count against him. "Who talked to you of going away?"

"I heard something—never mind. He has not sold the things, then?" she said, timidly.

"No. Who said he had?"

"No one, exactly; but I was led to believe it. I ought not to have believed it. And yet I don't know why he should not, if he pleased. They are all his, and God knows I would not ask to keep a thing which he wished to have."

"Lucy, I am not here to say that any thing he has done is right; but you will not accuse him of being a cold-hearted scoundrel?"

"He!" said Lucy, her pale face flushing crimson. "He never said an unkind word or did an unkind thing to me in my life, and as for this great sorrow, it is not his doing. I know what it all means, and I am a wicked little thing to rage against it when it is his salvation. Never you dare to say that I thought an ill thought against him, much less said a hard word."

Her changed mood was a great relief to Walter Latrobe, and thenceforth he managed his embassy with the calmness of a man of the world.

"You always knew my opinion of grief, Lucy," he said, "and all that you say shows me how right I was in believing you to be one of the best creatures in the world. And now

we will speak calmly, for you are in no state to be excited, and if I am to be your guardian I must insist in your minding what I tell you. I had a great mind not to talk business at all, but it may quiet your mind if I tell you one or two things. Every thing in this house, from the door-mat to the roof, is yours for ever and ever, to keep or do what you like with. Understand that. Then, as for living here—"

"Yes," she murmured, anxiously.

"It is the best thing you can do. There are four or five years of the lease yet, and if you should continue to like the place I dare say we can get it renewed for you. And there will be three hundred a year paid to you regularly. I take charge of that, and whether I am here, or in any other part of the world, my agents will honor your order. But for the comfort of having to tell you of these arrangements, Lucy, I would sooner have gone away from England than have undertaken to see you to-day."

While he was speaking Lucy's large eyes dilated in the most singular fashion, and fixed Latrobe's curious gaze upon them. His surprise seemed exceeding, but there was no pleasure in the surprise.

"As far as this part of the business goes," he said, after a pause, "I hope you think that he is behaving well."

"Walter, you must answer me something. Swear to tell me the truth."

"You will have nothing but the truth from me."

"Here you come, offering me more money than I ever thought to have in this world, and laying out a life of such comfort as money can give—and now tell me this: Does this come from what he gets with his—with the lady he marries? Answer me that truthfully, and do not—please do not—tell me a falsehood because I am a woman. I know men think that is all right, but I must and will know the truth, if I have to find it out for myself. Am I being taken care of out of—out of the price of his marriage—there?"

"Not a farthing of the provision comes from any source but his own property, and he always intended it for you."

"How long?" she asked, sharply, and he saw the meaning.

"Why, of course, from the moment he found it necessary to make the—the new arrangement," said Walter, trying to avoid words of unwelcome sound.

"And when was that?"

"I can not say exactly, but as I am his most intimate friend, I may well suppose that I knew his position nearly as soon as he did, and therefore I can say that it is but a short time since he discovered it."

"What I am now going to ask I know you will not tell me."

"At least try."

"It is of no use. You will say what you think least likely to hurt my feelings, and yet you will make a great mistake if you disguise the truth to spare me."

"As I said before, I will answer you frankly."

"Is it"—she said, gaspingly, but with steady resolution not to give way again—"is it a love-match, and will he be very happy?"

"It is not a love-match. I hope that he will be happy. I do not think that he will."

"But she is young, and beautiful, and good—I know all that—do not think to comfort me by saying that he has thrown himself away for money."

"I believe her to be all you say."

"Then why should he not be happy?"

"I can tell you my impression only," said Walter, gloomily. "I can not give you a reason, I can not give myself one."

This, of course, was untrue, but it was certainly not for Colonel Latrobe to explain his private thoughts to Mrs. Verner.

Lucy looked at him hard, but he contrived to preserve the look with which he had answered. Her color went and came rapidly for some seconds, and she kept silence. At last she said:

"Walter, you are a man of honor, and you have told me a falsehood. Don't be angry. You had a right to tell it. But you have not deceived me, and I am happier than I expected ever to be again."

"Yes," he said, man-like, "I was glad to believe that when you thought it over, and thought of the children, you would consider, perhaps, that as much had been done as possible to make a painful affair less painful, and I shall be sincerely happy to watch over your interests, and, indeed, the necessary documents are already in preparation."

"And," she said, gazing at him, not in scorn, for his kindness would have prevented that, but with a sort of sadness, "do you, Walter Latrobe, think that when I said happier—and I have not had such a word in my heart for I don't know the day when—do you believe I was thinking of furniture and money? No, no. But I am thinking of them now, thinking of them very much indeed, and I rely on you to take all and every care of me."

"Most certainly I will."

"And you don't ask what I mean?"

"Perhaps I had better not."

"I see. She is young, and beautiful, and rich, and good, and you laugh to think of my presumption in thinking it possible—and it is presumptuous, but we shall see."

"I had better know nothing of what you think or hope, Lucy. That is not within my province, as your friend or his. I am very glad to see you calm, and now I want to see you strong."

"Yes, and I mean to grow strong, for I mean to work like a little lion."

"Work, my child? What nonsense! Can't you live on three hundred a year?"

"Live, Walter? I mean to *save* three hundred a year. No, not quite so much, as I shall

have to pay my rent out of that money, at least until I get back all my clients."

"Did I not mention that? I am stupid to-day. I am to pay your rent."

"And not take it out of my allowance?"

"Certainly not."

"That is very kind, and I accept that too, with gratitude. Then I will save all my allowance."

"What on earth do you mean, Lucy?"

He was a good man, as men go, but he was always ready to think ill thoughts of women, though he treated them so kindly. But he had scarcely begun to let his thoughts veer in an unfavorable direction, as regarded Lucy, when they were promptly recalled.

"The eggs! The eggs!"

The illness and the excitement have worked on her poor little brain, thought Colonel Latrobe. She is simply going mad. This will be dreadful news for Ernest Dormer. And what am I to do with her, and then those dear children?

All which speculations rushed through the kind-hearted soldier's head with lightning speed, but they were all apart from the purpose.

"Why, how you glare at me, Walter! Did you never know how I maintained myself, and my mother until she died, dear soul! in the days before—before I became Mrs. Verner?"

"No—I—no, certainly not."

"I wonder he never told you. But he said that it was not honest, and that at all events he would not have it, so I only went on for pleasure and practice, and oh how glad I am I did! He was so kind about it, built me that little room—my pantry, as he called it—and gave me the splendid book of eggs, instead of a heap of dirty old sheets of pictures which I bought in Dean Street, and paid for, little by little, to a good old Jew."

"I also have paid money, little by little, to a good old Jew," said Latrobe, more and more puzzled, and scarcely knowing what he said.

"You don't understand yet. I forged eggs."

"Forged eggs?"

"Yes, do you not see?"

"Well, if you come to that," said Walter, who began to be amused, "I don't. What for? I remember in Shakspeare somebody says, 'Will you take eggs for money?' and where that's done I can see the good of forging. But in England—what *do* you mean, Lucy?"

"And you don't know? I could almost laugh, only I am sure that it would hurt me so dreadfully. Why, people collect eggs, buy them of dealers and at auctions, and the dealers get very high prices for some sorts, and don't pay badly for the forgeries, which are just as good as the real ones, of course, only the stupid buyers would not think so."

"And you used to paint the imitations."

"Yes. It was rather amusing work, and just suited me. I got to be very clever at it, and my forgeries would always sell. I got two or three little secrets about colors from a gentleman who forged pictures—I mean painted them, and then walked over them, and crinkled and crackled them, and stamped on them with dirty shoes, until they looked hideous enough, and then he sold them to picture-dealers, who named them Rembrandts, or what you please, and got awful prices from noblemen. I thought of trying that once, and the gentleman—he is now an eminent painter, and his works are bought for their own merits—he gave me some lessons. But I never could have brought my heart to trample upon my work and spoil it. So I kept to my eggs, and they were golden eggs for my mother and me."

"And you want to begin again?"

"I want to begin to sell again. I have a great many beautiful ones ready, only, as I told you, he would not let me sell them, but now he has nothing to do with it, so he can not be displeased. And I mean to get strong, and look up my old dealers, and work morning and night."

"But this is foolish, surely. Why not live on your allowance? And if you think it is not enough—"

"Dear Walter, it is a great deal too much for poor little me, but not for my object. I mean to put it all away, and you must take care of it, to the best advantage."

"It is quite right that you should think of providing for the children," said Colonel Latrobe (throwing a new fly), "but you must not injure your health, or deprive yourself of comforts."

"I shall get as strong as possible, I tell you, Walter, and I shall be as comfortable as I can be in this world, until—but I will not say any more. You will manage my affairs for me, and I will be most grateful. I will give you such a pretty set of eggs, in memory of to-day, if you will accept them."

"I told you an hour ago that you were one of the best creatures I know. Now I may say that you are one of the strangest."

"Oh, but accept my poor eggs. They are not much to offer, but they are given with a full heart, and they shall be the best I can paint."

"My dear silly girl, of course I will take them, and they shall have a place of honor in my rooms. But, as your guardian, I forbid you to begin too furiously. Take it easy until your health is restored. If you do not I shall interfere."

"Come and see me sometimes, and judge for yourself whether I am not behaving wisely."

"Very well. I shall have some business papers to give you in a few days."

"A very few days," said Lucy, losing the spirit with which she had been speaking, and again becoming deadly white. "Stop, please don't tell me. I know that any such business must be done before he—he goes away. But do not let me know any thing about the day—keep from me till all is over. I am very brave, but I think I should go mad if I knew the day."

"You shall not hear it from me. Do you read the newspaper? Better not."

"Yes, I will," said Lucy. "I will cut out what you mean, and I will wear it in a locket."

"Foolish. Wrong."

"You do not think so, Walter Latrobe. You have been pretending not to understand me, but you do understand me perfectly. You have told me—you did not mean it—but you have told me that which will give me strength and courage, and I will tell you something in return."

"You will not do so," said Walter Latrobe, firmly. "I told you so before, and please let this be always understood between us. I am a friend of Ernest Dormer's, and I have undertaken a duty at his request. I am no party to any thing inconsistent with that duty."

"Except one, Walter, you are the best friend I ever had, and I have learned it to-day, and God bless you!"

"By-the-way, Lucy," said Latrobe, resolved to change the conversation, "about money to go on with. May I give you some?"

"Not a farthing. I have plenty. I am rich. More than I can spend for three months—he left it here for me."

"Left it," repeated Walter.

"He brought the children home. They saw you with him in the gardens. You will remember when that was."

"Yes, I remember. You have never seen him since?"

"What makes you ask that?" said Lucy.

"On second thoughts, I don't ask it," said Walter Latrobe. "It is his secret, if there is any, keep it."

"Yes, indeed I will," said Lucy, the sudden tears once more starting to her large eyes.

But something had ruffled even Walter Latrobe, and he had rapidly passed into a condition of mind in which he was indisposed to play the comforter any more. He took her hand, looked at her kindly for a moment, just touched her forehead with his lips, and was gone.

The noise of the door instantly summoned the children, who flew to the window to kiss hands to their friend and benefactor before he should get to the gate. For a wonder Walter forgot to look round, and the roar which the Dormouse set up at his discourtesy might have been heard in the distant road. Mopes looked wistfully after him, too, but was instantly recalled to her self-appointed duties by the howl of her sister.

"How can you make such a noise, and mamma ill?" she said.

The Dormouse thought this question worthy of some attention, and she interrupted her roar in the middle, with a full intention of resuming it exactly at the place where it had broken off. But looking round at the person spoken of the child was effectually hushed.

"Her's dead."

It was not so, however, but Lucy had fainted.

"She believes that she will get him back again," said Walter Latrobe, as he walked away to his home. "And, by the Nine Gods, I am afraid to say that it is not on the cards. It all depends upon the temper and tact of the other one."

"The other one." Yes, that was the form of words adopted by the *preux chevalier* Colonel Walter Latrobe.

CHAPTER XX.

HEARTS IN THE HIGHLANDS.

THE sketching out a wedding tour, while over your manly shoulder leans tenderly the girl who is noting the places where, when you shall have taken her away from all her friends, she is to sojourn with yourself, in helpless reliance on your love and service, is one of the half dozen incidents of life which leave an abiding and a pleasant recollection. It will be for those who have thus far traced the lives of Ernest Dormer and Magdalen Conway to say whether, while the former, pencil in hand, was showing the latter, on the map of northern England and of Scotland, the stages of their journey, and their final resting-place during the honey-moon, both or either experienced all the most delightful of the sensations which should accompany that piece of cartography. It may be that all the Purple Light did not gleam upon that wedding journey.

But nothing was wanting to its happiness, so far as other persons could perceive. No bridegroom was ever more attentive and tender than Ernest, no bride could be more beautiful and gentle than Magdalen. They were dismissed to their happiness with all the honors of friendship and all the prayers of affection. No trouble seemed in store for them, and there was no doubtful future before them, into which a young husband had to look with a resolve to conquer future, and into which a young wife could but send glances of hope that he might win. Their future was assured, and after the customary interval between marriage and society, Ernest Dormer was to begin the dignified life of a country gentleman of ample means, and Magdalen Dormer was to return to her home, which would be brightened by the addition of conjugal love to that which had ever made it joyous.

"Papa was anxious to recommend the Caledonian Canal as our route to Inverness, dearest Magdalen," said Ernest, as on the third day after the marriage they were flying through the splendid scenery of the Highland line, and obtaining too brief glances at places whose names are histories.

"And I saw that you were trying to lead him away from that idea without exactly opposing it, dear. I know that you had some good reason, and I wondered why you did not give it him, as he is generally so very reasonable."

"The reason was over my left shoulder, love."

"What Sir, *me?*" said Mrs. Dormer, with a favorite avoidance of grammar.

"Yes, me. The steamboats are excessively comfortable, and I hope to hear you say so one of these days. But somehow people always

continue to find out when a newly-married couple is on board, and though it would be the proudest thing in the world for me to walk up and down the deck, and show myself the exulting owner of such a prize as this"—(his illustrative action it is immaterial to note)—"I am not sure that the situation would be quite so pleasant for my wife. I have been very curious, in my time, about other people's brides on board these boats."

"And how dared you be, Sir? Dearest, you think of every thing for me!"

And so they went on to Inverness, and Magdalen was quite enthusiastic about the pretty islands round which the Ness rushes and sparkles, and declared that all funereal gloom was absent from the cemetery, laid out, by a bold and original thought, on the summit of the woody hill of the Fairies. Next morning they departed in an open carriage for the house which had been lent them. And here if a lover of nature could not be happy the fault was not with his mistress.

The house, originally a shooting-box, but much enlarged in various directions, stood nearly at the top of a richly-clad hill, so high that except among mountains it would be called a mountain. The upward road to this nest was severe, but there was another and a winding path for the foot-traveler, and Ernest, having obtained the route at the last inn, stopped the carriage, and invited his wife to alight. As she smilingly obeyed he signed to the driver to go on, and opening a rustic gate he led Magdalen, wondering a little at his proceedings, into a sudden shade formed by the overarching and entwining boughs and branches of a wood. The sun's rays had been streaming somewhat fiercely on the open carriage, and this rapid change into sweet, soft greenery, in which the eyes loved to bathe themselves, was delicious to Magdalen. She stood still for a few minutes, leaning on his arm, in a silence which he would not break. At last she said, in a low voice:

"Tell me, dear, am I in a dream? I have been living so very fast lately that this quietude bewilders me."

"A dream, darling, which you may call up whenever it may please you. This is the opening of your own domain, for a happy month at least. We shall gradually wind round and up the hill till we come to the house. I thought that you would like this better than witnessing the struggle of the horses up the dusty road."

"Ernest, this is a Paradise. The sward is softer than any carpet, and only look at the rich tint of it. And oh, Ernest, look at those slanting rays breaking through the thinner foliage and coming down in green upon the wild-flowers, but beaten back, see, by those great strong branches that are so thick with leaves. I can never come away from here, Sir; you must send for a tent and set up our abode."

However, when his bride had gazed somewhat longer, and had gathered some flowers for her pretty traveling hat, he induced her to proceed, and he led her up the winding way, which increased in beauty as they came on. Here the varied lights and shades which had enchanted Magdalen gave place to a tiny lawn of light-green turf, which seemed prepared for a fairy tournament, and which was defined and guarded by rushes which might serve for the fairy lances. Then they came into a deeper and sterner gloom, which Magdalen enjoyed the more that she leaned on the arm of a protector, and here she lingered, amusing herself with mock terrors, which might have been real had she been alone. And now they found that they had made considerable upward progress, for suddenly, as they turned, they found a bold cutting in the forest to their right hand, and saw a broad and dashing river foaming white amidst its rocks many a yard below. To their left, against the side of the hill they were conquering, hospitality had placed a rustic seat, and hence Magdalen looked out, over the underwoods and the river, to some wide uplands, and to bold gray heights. Far away a shepherd's dog, with the marvelous instinct of his race, was doing all the work of the master, who seemed to do little but vouchsafe an occasional sign; and still farther away, and high on the ridge of a mountain forest, where some of the trees had been felled and had decayed, Magdalen saw, for the first time, the noblest of the beasts of British chase. There stood in his pride the lordly stag.

Rested and charmed, again up the hill, and they reached a point which almost suggested danger to the dweller in a less rough region. They were now very high, and the forest trees for a time disappeared from the side of the path, and left it narrow and naked, and overlooking precipices of what Magdalen thought terrible height, and around which some roaring water added, as it seemed, to the terror. But her sensation was scarcely a fear, and her husband's hand was in her own. They still climbed, and now the ascent began to be really steep, and the abysses to be more formidable, while the view, whenever it was afforded by a gap, became bolder and wider, and mountains of grander form, sometimes shrouded in mist, at others revealed in dim proportions, came upon the scene, and dwarfed what had previously been imposing. One more dark glade, and then a sparkling vista of light greenery, and then a turn in the path, a gate, and Magdalen stood in as prettily tinted and neatly kept a flower-garden as her own at Naybury.

"The very loveliest walk I ever had in all my life, Ernest, and I shall never forget it if I live a hundred years, as you say is the custom of people in this air, and I don't wonder at it, for I seem to have new strength. I could not have climbed such a hill in England."

"We have very good air in England, Mrs. Dormer, and especially near Naybury, where I hope to attend you up many hills. That you got up here so easily was due to the attentions of your devoted husband, who will now go and see to the disembarkation of your luggage.

Will you rest here, love, or come into the house?"

"Oh, my house. I must see my house. I never had a house before all my own—think of that!"

"No, dear Magdalen, and I am not to give you one of your own; so enjoy your undisputed right here as much as you can."

Magdalen looked at him for a moment, perhaps a little anxiously.

"It will be all the same at Naybury, dear, as if the house were yours—ours, I mean. I hope you are sure of that."

"It will be far better, dear. Only it is so pretty to see a young lady taking absolute command of a household. Come, however, and take it here."

She pressed his arm affectionately as they passed from the garden round to a little rustic porch, beyond which was a small stone hall, adorned with stag's antlers. A couple of Skye terriers, and another dog or two rushed out at them with the most frenzied clamor, as if bent upon the instant extirpation of the strangers; but three or four words from Ernest, intimating that his intentions were friendly, brought the creatures dancing around him and Magdalen, and apologizing by the most abject gestures of affection, after which the entire quadrupedal party suddenly started off in chase of a rabbit which had ventured within view. The cry of dogs brought out the neatest of little English maidens, who had been forwarded to the north specially to attend upon the bride, and also a large, powerful, dark-eyed Highland woman, a resident servant of the owners of the house, who was cook and chief, and who beamed the most favoring smiles upon Magdalen, but, not having any great fluency in English, reserved her utterances, and contented herself with seizing from the carriage which had just arrived about three times as much in the way of load as a southron servant would have attempted, and with this the Highland woman stalked into the house apparently without effort.

"Look at that, Magdalen," said Ernest. "If I had been called to the burglarious station in life I should not like to attack a house defended by that woman. This solitary abode is as safe as Woolwich Arsenal."

"Any thought of danger where you are never came to me," whispered Magdalen; "but I suppose, as you say, this is very solitary. What is that noise?" she exclaimed, as a new and continuous sound came upon her ear.

"Something you will love; but perhaps we had better go in before I tell you."

The powerful Highland woman came back, and with a gesture of singular grace invited them to enter.

"And I have a letter for you, Sir," said the smiling little English girl.

It was only a kind note from the owner of the house, welcoming the young couple to their first home, all things in and around which were placed unreservedly at their disposal, and assuring them that in Highland Margaret they would find the most devoted of vassals, and in little Netty, the English maid, the most attentive of domestics. A paper of suggestions about excursions, views, and the best way of enjoying that scenery was inclosed.

The house, if it could so be called, had shot out arms, polypus fashion, from a centre which had been the shooting-box, and which was now fitted up as a smoking-room. In different directions went away a long and rather narrow parlor, another room of somewhat more pretensions, which was library, drawing-room, and billiard-room in one, while another arm contained bedrooms and dressing-rooms, and a fourth seemed to lead to an outlying kitchen. All was small, and the endeavor of the owner had been to create a comfort and a snugness which on a splendid day of sunshine was less appreciated than when the gloaming came on, and the Highland forests began to talk aloud to the winds. There was little paint in the house; the wood-work seen every where was bright and varnished, and various gay colors, of the tartan kind, appeared in the furniture, and increased the cheeriness of the place. Magdalen hastened in delight from room to room, closely followed by Netty, whose intense admiration for her temporary mistress was noted and approved by Ernest. He liked to see others like what he liked.

"Netty," said Ernest, who had been told something about the house, and who never forgot what he had been told, "where are the stairs leading to the room with the balcony?"

"This way, Sir," said Netty.

"Mamma told us, Magdalen, to go into that room as soon as ever we arrived."

"So she did. I had forgotten. Let us go."

They mounted a short but steep stair, with red ropes on each side by way of balusters, and came into the balcony room, which was but slightly furnished—people did not come there for the sake of the room. Ernest threw open a French window, and stepped out upon a platform, strongly built, strongly railed, and after a searching glance that assured him of its security, he handed out his young wife. And in all her life she never forgot the scene which opened upon her.

They stood at a very great height, and immediately below them the ground sloped down at a sharp angle, until the eye was stopped by thick underwood at a distance of some forty yards, but it was manifest that a vast and unseen depth beyond had to be accounted for. Across that abyss, and perhaps a couple of miles away in the distance, the great lake lay, silver with sunshine, and between, a river, dotted with foam, made its way. But this could be seen but at intervals, the rich foliage hiding it at many points, and at others darkening it so that but for the foam-spots it would not have been visible. Hills of a great magnitude, but of somewhat soft outline rose on the left, at about the same distance as the lake, and at their foot

lay a small village on the bank of the river—Magdalen could just see a few gliding figures on the road, a few cattle reluctantly moving from their pasture. But on the right the scene was grander and rougher. One object dominated all—a huge and uncouth mountain, in solitary savageness, upheaved its bulk against the blue sky, and looked monumental and defiant, and though the noonday sun forbade it to scowl in shadow, perhaps its stern sides were the more striking from their being lighted out, and forced into brightness, like a cynical man compelled to smile upon society, but waiting to indemnify himself when the social period shall be over. And all the scene, the frowning mountain, the forests over the abyss, the softer hills, and the silent village, were bathed in the glow of a glorious sun, who, if according to southern superstition he looks down somewhat rarely on Scotland, looks on her with no grudging gaze when he beams out upon her unequaled scenery.

"It is too grand to talk about, love," said Magdalen, in a low voice, and with tears in her eyes—the first the young wife had shed.

He pressed her to his side, and knew he pleased her best by silence. And for a long time he let her enjoy the scene, only once or twice pointing out, without speaking, some feature which he specially wished her to note. But he waited for her to break the charm, and she was in no haste to do so. At last she said:

"That noise, Ernest. It can not be the wind, all is so still."

"Shall I show you what it means, or are you fatigued?"

"Fatigued—here. I never shall be."

"Then come with me. I will not take you far."

They went out, not entirely to the content of the Highland woman, who revealed to Netty a conviction that it was unlucky, after entering a house for the first time, to leave it without tasting food. To which Netty, bringing her English habits of mind to bear on the question, responded that no doubt they had had a good breakfast at Inverness, and that there was no use in eating when you were not hungry.

Skirting the house, which by-the-way its owners, or their friends, called the Star, from its radiating limbs, and taking a course which Ernest seemed to hit upon instinctively, they descended into another gloom of trees, and wound downward on a path still dark with damp in spite of the sunbeams, which in vain sought to penetrate the boughs. Magdalen caught a glimpse of a rustic bridge, which she pointed out, but Ernest replied:

"We will take that afterward."

The noise, which had increased greatly, ceased to puzzle Magdalen, and began to awe her, but her arm was in Ernest's. On he went down a steep but winding descent, where little could be seen but the trees close upon them, and occasionally the bright sky above, and then when Magdalen thought that they must be descending into the bowels of the earth, they came out on the edge of a broad and raving stream, churning madly, and its waves sometimes pausing, as it were, to give an angry hiss at treatment they had just received. A turn round a tall projecting bit of bank, and Magdalen stood in presence of the cataract.

Not much sunshine there, but a sudden sense of gloomy power. Down came the waters, falling perpendicularly a hundred feet, and diving into a blackened hole at which Magdalen shuddered. Diving, only to be thrust furiously out by the demons of the fathomless pool, and shot with terrible force into seething eddies that raged and ran round and round, as if in maddened terror, and then to be launched along the boiling course of the current. Vast masses of rock were cast about amidst the whirl, and against their bases the waters might be thought to be making desperate efforts to remove the obstruction before abandoning the fruitless task and hurrying on. But, even more than the great fall, the gorge in which it was placed impressed Magdalen. The sides were lofty, and presented walls of naked gray rock, save that here and there a fissure or a projection had permitted moss to cling, and high again above these stern walls trees had taken savage hold, as they might, and had grown, defyingly, in fantastic attitudes, some leaning over as gazing down into the waters far below, some backward, as if they feared to look over. Behind the cataract, the stone, where it could be seen, was black, but to right and left, reckless of the furious rush close by, a few flowers clung, at various heights, upon earth that had been carried over the fall, and had become fixed.

"Oh, the dear, helpless flowers!" was Magdalen's exclamation, as she made them out, after a long and awed gaze upon the cataract, and after long listening to its toneless clamor.

"Do you wish for some of them?"

"Ernest!" she exclaimed. "But you only meant to frighten me. I would not have you go nearer than we are for the world."

"There is no danger, love. Will you not like to come down these rocks and see the pool closely?"

"No, no. I have seen enough for many dreams. If you do not care about staying, will you take me away?"

"Instantly. But I hope you will come here often, and learn to enjoy the place."

"It is too—what do I mean?—it is too strong. An old, fierce terror—one can imagine it alive, and full of malicious delight at thought of people whom it has carried away to destruction."

"See how quietly the river flows at a little distance. Look down that vista."

"I don't like it. There the poor creatures must have floated away after the terrible fall."

"I should be sorry to destroy any idea which makes the place more impressive, but I very much doubt whether the cataract has had many victims—perhaps, in the course of ages, some wanderer may have lost his way in a mist, and fallen over. But when you come to the top

you will see another phase of the waters. Look up—there is the bridge you pointed out."

"Do not let us go there, Ernest. I ask you not."

"Then we will not."

"Dear Ernest, do not think that I am giving way to foolish fear, and I am sure you know I am not likely to think that it makes a girl interesting. You are not supposing that?"

"*That*—in my Magdalen!" he said, caressingly.

"But that fall has worked in a strange way upon my nerves. I am not frightened. I don't know that I could tell you what I feel. But please take me home."

"My darling, if the living near the place is likely to be unpleasant to you, we will go. I can find a score of homes in the heart of scenery as fine as this, and you have only to make me think that you will not be happy here—"

"I shall be very happy—perfectly happy—only let me get away, just now, from this gloom. Perhaps I may ask you to bring me another time; you know how inconsistent wives are. Or no, you don't know, Sir, as I am your first wife—you will know better when you are choosing your next."

They had reached a sunshiny place, and this little playfulness should have brought a sunshiny, or shall we say a honey-moonlighted answer. But Ernest Dormer did not, on the instant, reply by even an affectionate gesture. Magdalen of course interpreted his silence in the most loving way, and begged his pardon for saying any thing that could give him a moment's pain.

"But I intend to live with you for a hundred years at least," she said.

And by this time he had recovered himself to make fitting answer, and so they came back to the Star.

This time Highland Margaret was not inclined to permit any new tempting of luck, and they found a capital lunch awaiting them, and Margaret herself in attendance to see that it was not neglected. The friends who had lent the house had not forgotten to leave all that was needful to make a Highland sojourn as little unlike home-life in England as possible, and it was in a bumper of no ordinary claret that Ernest drank the health of his bride, and bade her welcome to her house. Nor need it be said that he caused the powerful Margaret to signify her good wishes for their prosperity, and that the toast was honored by her in some Gaelic which enchanted Magdalen, and which she repeated, with more or less success, whenever Ernest filled her glass thereafter.

"And you think that you can manage a month in this eagle's nest, dear?" he asked, when they were left to themselves.

"We will try," said Magdalen, prettily.

"There are a good many books," he said, "but unless we have bad days we shall not trouble them much. You should rest, I think, for a little while, and then we will begin these excursions, about which I have received our friend's hints. There is an inn down yonder—you can just see it from this window—whence we are to take our carriages for this part of the country."

"I will be very quiet, if you will let me," said Magdalen, "but you will find me very obedient."

"I hope I shall," he said. "And once for all I lay my high and sovereign commands upon you, as 'kind mate bound by holy vow,' that you do exactly and precisely what you like, and that when I suggest any thing that you do not like you tell me of it."

Magdalen promised. But it was not what she wanted, though she rebuked herself severely when she found that she was unthankful.

"You have seen a great deal of the world and of life," she said.

"Yes, I suppose I have. But what leads my wife's thoughts in that direction?"

"I have not seen a great deal of either. You will very soon find this out, if you have not found it out already, dear."

"I find that you know all that I could wish you to have known—much that I should never have had the wisdom to wish for—and the happiest thing of all is that you believe in me for the rest."

"Yes, dear, faithfully."

"But there is something more."

"No—yes—would it be possible for me to say any thing that you could misunderstand, or that could vex you? I hope not."

"I swear to you never to understand any thing which you may ever say in any sense but one, and that the most affectionate."

"Ah, if you will. And it is not of myself that I am thinking."

"Let me think of yourself. I have nothing else to do. I will do nothing else."

"Dearest, you have seen the world, and I suppose that most of its pleasures are beginning to weary you. You have married a girl who has not seen much of them. I want to ask you, when in your kindness and love you are planning all kinds of enjoyments for her, and not because you care about them, to remember that her one enjoyment is in the thought that she is the sort of wife to make you happy."

And she threw her arms round his neck.

After other befitting acknowledgment, he said:

"I have seen a good deal, love, but I am not at all wearied, and all my pleasure in life will be renewed in making you enjoy it."

The dialogue gradually glided away into other channels, but Magdalen had not managed, as yet, to say all that she wished to say, and she was timid, lest she might seem to be offering him any kind of counsel. Hers was a beautiful mind, nor would Ernest Dormer have failed to detect its modest and secret beauty but for circumstances that disturbed his own keen mental vision.

"Ernest," she said, "I had nearly forgotten.

What an undutiful creature I am! We promised to write to mamma as soon as we arrived here."

"You promised, Mrs. Magdalen."

"But we were married, Sir, so it was the same thing. I have read Blackstone's Commentaries, at least pieces of them, and I know all my rights."

"You shall have them all," said Ernest, smiling. "Well, I did better than promise, for while you were choosing among those Highland brooches, which every body buys the first time of coming to Scotland, and nobody the second—"

"Stop, Sir. If it was not the right thing to do, why did you encourage me, and give me your advice, and pay for the brooch, which I consider a perfect darling, and I will never part with it?"

"Do I not tell you, dear—because it is the right thing to do the first time. Well, I went across and telegraphed to Naybury, to say that we were safe thus far, and would write to-morrow. Mamma is at this moment thinking of us as at lunch, and hoping that we have got every thing we like, and that we did not leave many things behind us at our other resting-places."

"Dear thing, I am certain she is. That was very good in you."

"By-the-way, Magdalen dear, how admirably your papa spoke at the breakfast! I have been at sundry weddings, but I never heard any thing so happy."

"But then you were never being married, you know. Did he speak well, dear? I am sure he would. But I heard none of the speeches. Even about yours, although I listened to every word, I could only say that you never seemed to stop, and that every body was applauding—no idea would stay with me long enough to let me understand it."

"I was brief enough, dear. The speeches of the day were those of papa, and of my friend Samuel Mangles. But that he should speak well is nothing, it is his specialty. His business was to recollect that he was a distinguished London man, brought down express to sparkle at the wedding of his friend with the prettiest girl in the county, or all the counties, and he fulfilled his engagement, and earned his breakfast."

"You make me laugh, dear, but I should not laugh if I thought that was all your best friend felt for you."

"My best friend has her hand in mine," said Ernest, as became a bridegroom.

"You will want stronger friends than a weak girl," she murmured. "And you are very kind to try to make me feel that I am of value to you. But I shall never be to you what mamma was to papa. To be sure, you will not need such a help-mate."

"I have heard him own that he owed his position and success to his wife's energy."

"Yes, he does. And I may confide to you that though he is not quite so willing to own it—and it is natural, men being so proud—he owes quite as much to her earnest and affectionate encouragement of him. It was not only the urging him on to do things, I suppose many wives venture to do that. Mrs. Bulliman—you like her—"

"A wretch."

"No, she has many good points, I assure you. But she urges Mr. Bulliman to do various things, but is very unkind and rude to him, especially if he fails, which he often does from taking her advice. But mamma made up her mind that papa was one of the cleverest men that ever lived, and she never would allow him to forget it, and that has helped him on as much as any thing."

"My dear Magdalen, you have observed closely, and you have given capital sketches of two wives."

"But I have not been uncharitable, dear," said Magdalen; "at least I hope not. Mrs. Bulliman is really a very good woman, and a most attentive mother."

"And though she is said to be proud, she showed becoming humility on that occasion, when she allowed Miss Phœbe to take a bride-maid's part because the originally intended performer was absent."

"Nay, was it not kind? We ought not to laugh at her for that, Ernest."

"We won't. But I suppose that it will be Miss Phœbe's last appearance in such a part, and that she is not likely to take the more important one in which Miss Conway was so charming."

"I was not charming, Ernest dear. I know quite well that I look pretty well sometimes—e e e—my finger—yes, I *will* be good—I *will* say generally, but on that day I looked as white as any ghost."

"Then, love, you were one of

> 'The gentle ghosts, with eyes as fair
> As star-beams among twilight trees.'"

"Who said that, Ernest? How lovely!"

"You have never read Shelley?"

"Papa said that I had better read him, but mamma had heard some opinions that made her suppose the poetry would do me no good, and she asked me not to take down the book. I would not vex her for the world, and I have never opened it, though it stands on a shelf I pass fifty times a day. He was—at least he believed nothing—was it not so?" said Magdalen, in an undervoice.

"You may think that he believed a great deal too much, my love. But I understand you, of course. He was not a Christian."

"You shall guide me in all my reading, Ernest, and I shall trust to you not to let any book do me harm."

What have I married? thought Ernest Dormer to himself, as his beautiful wife laid her head on his shoulder, and subsided into a dreamy silence. Here is a girl who is told that she ought not to read a book, which she also hears is read

by most people, and she has never touched it. Yet she has a will. I have seen that. And she has the stronger will which subjugates her own wishes to what she considers duty.

And then, passing from the thought of Magdalen's merits to that of his own position, Ernest Dormer hastily reviewed much of his life, and the issue to which he had brought it. After all troubles, all struggles, all follies, there he was, with one of the sweetest women in the world lying half asleep on his shoulder, and his for all time. The reality of his good fortune had hardly come home to him before.

They were a long time silent and still. But there are limits to every thing, and at last the limits of Highland Margaret's patience with wedded lovers were passed. With a most discreet clatter she made her way to the apartment, and found Ernest, of course, looking out at the window with a telescope, and Mrs. Dormer studying Black's Scottish Guide. They looked quite pleased to see her, and entered with much interest into her various proposals about dinner. Magdalen took her heart by storm by an attempt at repeating the Gaelic good wishes, and Ernest by his attention to the dogs, her favorites, who ventured in after their patroness. And after a good talk with Margaret, and after various equally important conversations with Netty, who was unhappy until Magdalen had examined the house from corner to corner, and had formally assumed the mistress, Ernest and his wife settled down into their Highland home.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HONEY-MOON, AND ITS SETTING.

In that pleasant home they sojourned for the appointed time. On their arrival Ernest had spoken of excursions and explorations, and Magdalen had aided him to map out such little routes, and there was a sort of understanding that they were to see as much of the country around them as possible. But day after day passed, and these researches were postponed, for the lightest reasons, and husband and wife felt, and at last avowed, a disinclination to extend their wanderings beyond the limits of the domain which had been placed at their command. Sometimes, in the evening, when the day had been spent in the pleasantest idleness, and neither could give a better account of the time than that it had passed quickly and happily, Ernest and Magdalen made solemn resolve that next morning they would certainly set off to visit some mountain, or lake, or glen that had been specially commended to their attention by the thoughtful owners of the house, but with the bright morning came the feeling that the wedded lovers could not improve their position, and mountain, lake, and glen were left to their solitude. Walks through the woods, long halts in the shade, and hours passed among the rocks at the foot of the cataract, which soon lost all its terrors for Magdalen—so the days went by.

"We shall have very little to say to mamma about Highland scenery, Magdalen," said her husband one morning, as they were seeking their way down the path to the waterfall, "We must really read up the guide-books, and cram for an examination."

"I was thinking, too," Magdalen said, laughing, "that she will be greatly amused at hearing how little we have done, but we must tell her the truth, and say that we were too happy to care about moving away."

"I think you have been happy here," he answered, earnestly.

"And you?" asked his wife, archly—yet something in his tone seemed to her to be out of tune with her heart.

"Nay, you need not ask that."

They seated themselves on a favorite rock, and there was no more said about happiness just then.

"I brought a book," he said, after a pause, "but the sound of the water is pleasanter than that of the voice, perhaps."

For the moment Magdalen thought that she should prefer silence and her own thoughts, but she instantly conquered the feeling, and answered, merrily:

"That is a most ingenious excuse for idleness, Sir, but I will not have it. I am greatly interested in that wonderful story, and all the time I am angry with myself for trying to believe such impossibilities."

"Yes, dear, those are the effects M. Dumas produces, but he is very good reading, notwithstanding. So now hear how the Four Dukes went forth to murder, and whether they succeeded."

He translated with so much ease that Magdalen would hardly have known that he was not reading an English book to her. But they soon wearied even of the *Reine Margot*, and after half an hour they found themselves again listening to the voice of the cataract.

Ernest had said that he thought that Magdalen was happy, and to her own question he had replied in a way implying that such question was needless. But how did Magdalen answer to herself—Ernest to himself?

For the latter it may be said that, as far as he might, he avoided self-questioning. There had been much in his life that made the process unwelcome, and it was not simply in the spirit of a philosopher that he sought to enjoy the present hour without troubling himself about its successor. He was glad to be constantly compelled to devote himself to the fair girl by his side, and it may be that he was even more assiduous in his attentions to her than he himself knew. He was grateful to her for speaking to him, grateful to her for making him speak, and for her leading him into new and fresh thought and habit. Day by day a strange and widening distance seemed to set itself between Ernest Dormer and his old life, and he was glad that

THE HONEY-MOON.

it was so, and jealously watchful lest he should allow himself to bridge that gap by thinking on times that had gone by. If it be said that this was not the frame of mind of a happy and newly-wedded lover, and that Magdalen deserved a heartier and healthier regard, there is no contradiction to the censure, there is full assent to the claim. But the reader is in the secret.

Magdalen was not. Nor was she conscious that any secret was between them. But she was conscious that up to the present time any ideal that she had formed in her girlhood as to the communion of married lovers was being imperfectly fulfilled. Her handsome and accomplished husband was all tenderness and devotion, her wishes were forestalled, and even suggested, and the new companionship, so strange to a young bride, was made delightful by the unerring delicacy of Ernest's attentions. It was impossible for Magdalen to wish that there could be any change in her husband's manner or behavior. But her feminine instinct, quick-

ened perhaps by long and anxious thought, assured her that no first love—no entire and passionate love, was by her side. Ernest seldom or never talked of himself. Of her he was ever ready to talk, and into the least details of her life, into her minutest feelings, no less than into all her innocent history, her husband seemed singularly happy to inquire, instantly ready to be interested in all that she could tell him. But she got little in exchange, little, that is to say, of the same that she gave him. He spoke lovingly, and whether with effort or not he was ungrudging in his love-homage, and showed no sign of preoccupation of mind, while his lighter talk was charming. His travels, his reading, his own literary work, his anecdotes, his ready wit, his acquaintance with good society and what he pleased to tell of other than good society, all supplied them with fresh and varied conversation, and Magdalen was instructed and amused as she had never before been. But she wanted more, and for the time that want was not supplied. A few hesitating, timid efforts—hints at which an impassioned lover would have darted with rapture—to obtain more insight into his heart, she risked in certain quiet hours, but ceased from them with some sensation of chill at her own heart when she found that though she was kindly met, she made no real advance.

Of course, had Magdalen had the advantage of a course of French novels, or even of their feebler English reflections, we know that she could have solved the problem at once, and at some well-chosen moment of passion could have flung herself demonstratively on his bosom, and grappled him to her own while she sobbed out a half-fierce, half-tender demand to know what rival had come between her and his love, and a command either to leave her forever, or to give her all that she had thought she had acquired in wedding him. And it is impossible to say what the result might have been. But, you see, Magdalen was a modest English girl, very willing to be loved, not averse from any modest and womanly arts by which love might be won, but for want of such educational prompting as has been mentioned, and in the absence of a habit of demonstration, Mrs. Dormer did not avail herself of the stormy expedient which she might have tried.

Her course was tame and unimpassioned. She had promised and vowed to love her husband, and she intended to do so. It might be that he was learning to love her as fully as she could desire, but, being older than herself, and knowing more of human nature, he was not in haste to open to her all the treasures of his affection. The girl, not unaware of her own goodness, might pout at this hesitation, the wife smiled down her self-love, and awaited the just judgment which she knew must come. In the mean time she would not seek for more than he pleased to give, but nothing on her part should retard the day when all a husband's confidence should be hers. And at least she would show him that she fully trusted in him, and that her heart was in his hands.

It would therefore seem that here were the materials for a delightful honey-moon, and neither Ernest nor Magdalen ever allowed that theirs had not been delightful. The days sped fast.

One morning, at breakfast, a note was brought to Ernest.

"Am I permitted?" he said, with an affectation of extreme deference.

"Certainly not, Sir; give it me directly," said Magdalen, laughing, and holding out her hand.

His delay in obeying did not occupy a second, yet there was a delay, and Magdalen saw it, and drew back her hand hastily as he put out the note to her. It was the first letter he had received since their marriage, except some dispatches from her parents which were playfully directed to Mr. and Mrs. Dormer.

"I don't seem to know the writing," said Ernest, who had not failed to see her action, and who was hurt with himself, for he had not thought of first perusing the note, but certain old habits had told for a moment. "Do you, love?"

Good girl that she was, she instantly took up the note, and if there was the least irritation in her mind she conquered it in an instant, and had a smile for him as she read and gave back the paper.

"Yes, Sir, I do know the handwriting. It is by a gentleman, and a dear friend of mine."

"Does he want to defy me to a duel for your sake? I am his man: but where is that volume of Dumas? I must see what it is chivalrous to do in such a case. Whichever falls, the other must commit the body to the cataract. Meantime, love, another cup of coffee."

"You don't recognize the hand. He will be so pleased. It is one of his little whims."

"Come down to the inn, where you are waited for?" read Ernest. "Margaret," he called, "are there a few pistols in the house, or have you a broadsword or so?"

Magdalen clapped her hands with glee.

"It is a shame to spoil his little surprise for you, dear, but I will not be in any secret without you. It is papa."

"Mr. Conway!"

"Yes. But why he has come without letting us know he must tell us himself. Oh, Ernest!" she said, suddenly becoming serious—and he read her thought in a second.

"No, no, love. He has no bad news—your first thought was the right one. He would not have sent such a note if any thing were wrong—see, he has drawn something at the top—I suppose it is meant for a couple of doves—you and me."

"Dear old thing, so he has. How silly I was. But it is your fault, Sir. You have taken me away from every body, and kept me a prisoner here, and now I am startled at any thing from any body but yourself. I hope you

are very sorry for your conduct," she said, leaning on his shoulder. And as he professed intense sorrow, she forgave him, and, silently, told him so.

"What shall we do?" said Ernest. "Pretend not to know the handwriting, and send down word that Mr. Dormer declines to meet strangers. Or would he prefer my going down, and being duly astonished?"

"Let us both go down directly, dear. I do so long to see his dear old face, and mamma's!"

"But I will bet that I can give you that pleasure without your going down this hot morning," said Ernest, crossing the room, and taking up the telescope, which he brought to bear upon the inn at the foot of the hill. "It is not in human nature, at least in nature above a bagman's, to keep away from that window long, even for a Highland breakfast. I see something moving. No, that is a tall girl, one of the servants. The light is well upon the room, we shall have them presently. The girl is tasting something: that is very considerate and careful in her. She moves away suddenly, somebody else has come in—I can't see yet. Yes, another female figure has gone to the table—I can't make her out."

"Let me see, dear."

He knelt, so as to give his shoulder as a rest for the instrument.

"Have you the window?"

"Yes, it shines beautifully in the sun, but I can not make any thing out," said Magdalen. "I can see better with the naked eye—oh, I am looking at the lake."

"Well, that is very beautiful also," said Ernest, laughing, "but—"

"I see her! It is mamma. She has come to the window. The servant is pointing in our direction. I believe she sees us—wave a handkerchief, dear, quick."

"There's a banner somewhere here—that will be more dignified," said Ernest, hastily fetching the article, and holding it forth in the sun. It was instantly saluted from the inn—two white handkerchiefs shot out, and Magdalen recognized both parents. And for the first time Ernest had to exert a little kindly authority, as they went down, to prevent his wife from performing the journey too hastily. In half an hour, however, Magdalen was in her mother's arms, whence she was speedily transferred to her father's.

"Not half so brown as you ought to be, Mrs. Dormer," said Mrs. Conway, as they sat round the breakfast-table, which had been rapidly and lavishly spread for the Conways.

"Scold Ernest, mamma."

"And I will. Papa and I were prepared to see you well scorched with your rambles, and you look as if you had been indoors all the time."

"We have not, I assure you," said Ernest; "in fact we have lived in the open air, but I must own that we have taken things quietly."

"Why, you have never even been here, I find," said Mrs. Conway, "though the view of your house, from this side, is so charming."

"I have been down two or three times," said Ernest, "about horses," he added, demurely.

"Yes," said Mrs. Conway, "and you have been punctually followed, next morning, by your messenger, to say that the horses were not wanted. Maggie has not been ill, I am sure," said the mother, "or you would have let us know."

"I am inclined to think," said Mr. Conway, that the young persons have been so spoiled by the splendid scenery of Naybury—that Scotland is flat to them by comparison. Or was it that they did not want to be spoiled for Naybury by the irregularities of Scotland?"

"Neither," said Ernest; "and I will make clean confession, for the fault has been entirely mine—or rather yours and mamma's. You gave me society that was so exceedingly satisfactory that I never cared about coming away from home. That is the whole truth."

"*Habemus confitentem reum*," said Mr. Conway, "so no more is to be said. Moreover, you did exactly what I should have done under similar circumstance, but for circumstances over which I had no control."

"Yes, that's true," said Mrs. Conway. "On our wedding tour papa wanted to stick at Thun, because it was so delightful; but I had no notion of not seeing as much of the country as possible, especially as I did not know that I should ever see it again; and I made him travel about until, I believe, he was quite glad when the trip was over. Men are dreadfully lazy creatures, except in their own particular work."

"One mountain is uncommonly like another," said Mr. Conway. "And if you travel only for the sake of talking about what you have seen, you may invent any account you like, and those who have been in the same district are afraid to contradict you. Two travelers at a dinner-table at home are never so enthusiastic as over the description of landscapes which neither has seen, for the best of all reasons."

"Well, we shall put an end to your idleness now," said Mrs. Conway. "You have had nearly five weeks, and here we are, as we promised. We slept at Inverness last night, and papa wanted to stay to a late breakfast, but I made him come on."

"I didn't care about the breakfast," said Mr. Conway, "but I wanted to see the bridge over the Ness, because I had heard a story about it. There was a cell in one of the piers, and in this, before the days when mad people were kindly treated, they used to keep any pauper lunatic who was troublesome. When the river rose it drove up the rats into the cell, and it was one of the amusements of the place to stand and listen to his shrieks while the rats were eating him."

"Do not tell such horrible stories, William. I do not believe that such atrocities were ever allowed."

"I could tell you of worse things than that, my dear," said Mr. Conway, "but I will not spoil your breakfast. I am speaking of the old

days. They are gone, and so is the old bridge, and the lunatics are kept in a beautiful asylum on a hill."

"So you have no news to tell us, Maggie?" said her mother.

"Only the good news, mamma, that we have been so happy."

"God bless you, my child; always have that to tell me, and I want no more," said Mrs. Conway, her eyes swimming. "Don't be a hypocrite, papa," she added, raising her honest face toward her husband, who pretended to want to look out at the scenery, "for at this minute you can no more see the mountains than I can. There," she said, wiping her eyes, and laughing, "that is for the first and last time." And she put her hand in Ernest's, but he rose and kissed her, for which graceful and filial conduct Magdalen felt inclined to do the same by him, but reserved her approbation.

"And is there any news from Naybury, mamma?" she asked.

"Well, not much beyond what we have told you in our letters. There is something wrong at Saxbury; but we do not in the least know what."

"And therefore, of course, we believe the worst," interjected Mr. Conway.

"Mr. Abbott, that lawyer, is constantly there."

"Observe the emphasis on 'that,'" remarked her husband. "Yet we know nothing against Mr. Abbott, except that he is a lawyer."

"Of course he is helping the rector in some nefarious scheme," said Mrs. Conway.

"Too hard a word, my dear. It means not only wicked, but wicked in the extreme."

"Does it? I am glad of it, for I dare say it is exactly the right word."

"But you really must not bring Ernest back to Naybury charged with all sorts of unfounded prejudices against the resident clergy of the Church of England. My dear Ernest, we know nothing whatever against Mr. Grafton, or about his business with his lawyer."

"You had better say, William, that Mr. Grafton is an angel, which he never was and never will be."

"I do not think he ever was. I have no information enabling me to decide the second point. But we must not prejudice Ernest, who will probably meet him in society, and can form his own opinion."

"He will not meet him at our house, with my consent. That ——," said Mrs. Conway, whose kind nature instantly reminded her that she was forgetting that the house was to be Dormer's also, "if Ernest should like to invite him he shall receive every attention, but I do not think that I should ask him to come to see me."

"At the wedding," said Ernest, "I had not much inclination to notice the guests, but Mr. Grafton seemed a courtly kind of person, with sufficient sense of his own merits. A much better mannered man than his son, I thought."

"Yes, as far as outsides go, no doubt," said Mrs. Conway. "But Edward Grafton, though he is impulsive, and nervous, and awkward sometimes, has a heart, which is more than any body can say of his father."

"And we have come five hundred miles to abuse Mr. Grafton."

"No, William dear, not abuse, but truth is truth. But there is somebody who is going to speak her mind about the whole family at Saxbury, Maggie, and is, I hear, going over to Saxbury to do it."

"Not Mrs. Bulliman, mamma?"

"Who else could do it, child? Yes, and though I hate scandal generally, I could not help making Mrs. Fanshaw promise to write me word what takes place. Mind I send her an address that will reach me."

"Then," asked Ernest, laughing, "is regular notice given of the lady bishop's visitation of her clergy?"

"It comes to much the same thing. You know, I think, what chiefly decided Mrs. Bulliman on rebuking the rectory people—it was some light talk by Edward Grafton about missionaries. She declared at the Dorcas meeting that she would remonstrate, but she waited to see the effect of some letters which she made her girls write to Edward, in which his deplorable wickedness was set out. We know what sort of letters they compose, because poor little Fanny Buxton had to endure a pack of them, which she brought to me."

"That very pretty little girl, Ernest, a bridemaid," said Magdalen.

"I remember Miss Buxton," said Ernest, "but I do not think her so very pretty, though by contrast with Miss Bulliman she may have seemed so."

"Oh, but she is sweetly pretty," said Magdalen, "though you don't like the word."

"Yes, I do, in its place, and it exactly suits her, so far as I recollect. I have an impression of what you call, dear, a sweetness, particularly unacceptable to me. But I saw very little of her, you know, and I can look again, if you like, some of these days."

"You shall, for she is one of my pets."

"She is a very good little girl," said Mrs. Conway, "and I take some credit to myself for having helped to make her one, instead of letting her run away into becoming a little goose, as she was rather inclined to do."

"It is not for me to question mamma's ability at making good girls," said Ernest, speaking to nobody in particular, and in an undertone.

"I hear you, Sir," said Magdalen.

"The scene at the rectory will be interesting," said Mr. Conway, "unless the rector subdues his pride, and smiles the lady out of court. Let me see: is there nothing else that will interest our young hermit and his bride, our Edwin and Angelina? Our Naybury annals are not exciting, it must be owned."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Conway. "I

thought the place frightfully dull after London, but as soon as I began to take an interest in my neighbors the dullness went away, and now I seem to wonder how any body can be dull at Naybury. Ernest will soon get used to it, and then he will feel as I do."

"He has to get used to me first, mamma," said Magdalen, saucily.

"Yes," said Mr. Conway. "And when that feat is accomplished he must take stock of the neighborhood. He must be interested in the quarrels between Beccles, the doctor, and the Board of Guardians; also in Beccles's buying a new horse or selling an old trap. Then he must be eager for the last scandal about Sir Richard Salvington, and his bad behavior to his wife and his Jews. We shall endeavor to make him very anxious about the drainage over at Trafalgar, and perhaps he will devote his literary abilities to stating the case of the unhappy tenants who are being poisoned. The subscription for the memorial window in honor of the last vicar has languished: it would be a graceful thing for Ernest to take it up on our assurance that the late lamented was a very good man. Then there is Cutcheon's encroachment on Barfield Green; that is a case for a village Hampden with a dauntless breast; and then the history of our Ruins has never been properly written. Besides which, there is the great case of the landlord of the beer-shop at the end of the town, and his conduct toward the two tipsy militiamen, on which awful proceeding we have new lights every day; in fact, my dear son-in-law, have no fear lest occupation and excitement should not be provided for you."

"Your papa must find fault," said Mrs. Conway, "but you will tell Ernest, Magdalen, that any kindness done in Naybury is very gratefully received, and that nobody will expect him to trouble himself in the least about any thing that does not concern him. I never knew a place where you were so entirely free to do as you liked."

"That is a new view of the case, certainly," said Mr. Conway.

"And you are doing the very thing you were warning me against just now, that is, prejudicing Ernest against people before he knows them."

"I will take care that he is not prejudiced, mamma," said Mrs. Dormer. "Have you heard any thing about my poor pensioners? Have any of them been to you?"

"Only that good-for-nothing woman, Mrs. Jull, who came asking for old clothes, and who had clearly been at the public house."

"Did you give her any thing, dear? I hope so. Her husband is a cripple."

"I gave her a lecture, which I think she is not likely to forget."

"I dare say she deserved it, but I can see by your eyes that you did more than that."

"If I did, it was for your sake, not hers, my dear. Oh, and that very detestable and impertinent woman who locked up her cottage and went away—I always forget her name, but it reminds me of fawning?"

"I know, mamma—has she come back?"

"I don't know, but a servant at Saxbury has got a strange story about her—a girl who nurses the children at Mrs. Blaby's, the clerk's wife, and went into the church one night after service, just before the doors were closed—"

"To fetch," said Mr. Conway, gravely, and looking earnestly at his son-in-law, "to fetch two ipecacuanha lozenges which the second child had left on the third hassock from the door of pew 43—be careful, my dear Ernest, of being led to believe that the lozenges were liquorice, or that they were on the prayer-book ledge—I know such things have been said."

"But, William, dear," said Mrs. Conway, "the curiosity of the thing is in the very minuteness of the story, so you ought not to laugh. I don't know what the girl went for, but she reported to her mistress that the woman I speak of came out of the vestry, in which there was nobody but Edward Grafton—he had read the service—and that she was putting up gold in a purse—the money chinked. And that night she disappeared."

"First, is the story likely to be true, or an invention of the girl's?" said Mr. Conway. "I hear of it for the first time. You know what Mr. Mill says about the lower orders, namely, that they are habitual liars."

"But this is a good girl," said Mrs. Conway. "I know something about her; she was in a Sunday-school, and I could take her word."

"A mystery, expressly got up in honor of Ernest Dormer's settling at Naybury," said Mr. Conway. "I did not think that we should be able to give you such good entertainment. When we get home we will make it our business to ferret out the great secret of the curate's gold."

"You do not hazard a guess at the riddle, love," said Ernest.

"I have no sort of guess. But Mrs. Faunt is a very strange person. If I say that nothing she did would surprise me, I only mean that she is utterly unlike the class of persons among whom I found her, and I should have passed her door always except for fear of hurting her feelings."

"We shall have time to speculate on the mystery," said Mr. Conway. "Ernest, I have not smoked in masculine company since you left us. Shall we leave our wives to take care of one another, while we stroll down to that river?"

As they went Mr. Conway said:

"You told me, wisely, that you did not want to be troubled with letters during your trip, so I left two or three that have come to Naybury. One of them has a signature in the corner of the envelope—Walter Latrobe, I think."

Ernest Dormer felt as one feels when a pleasant dream is unpleasantly broken. His old life came back to him with the words, and seemed to set itself steadily in array against him. He recalled his last interview with Latrobe, and the promise which the latter had been compelled to give him that he should be informed of what

the soldier had done in his friend's behalf; and for the moment Ernest found it difficult to account to himself for the exceeding earnestness with which he had enforced his request. He wished that Latrobe had not written. But the letter had been left behind in Naybury, and there must be another month before he could receive it. That was something, and with a strong effort of will he dismissed the train of thought which the words of Mrs. Conway had suddenly raised.

"And you can give our Maggie a pretty good character, Ernest, eh?" asked her father. "We have not imposed upon you with an imitation of a nice kind of wife?"

"My wife has one fault," said Ernest, taking the hand of his father-in-law.

"Well, she must correct it. Tell me, and I will reprove her."

"She makes me despair of ever being quite worthy of her."

"You will get over that," said Mr. Conway, "and, as an older married man, I advise you not to reproach her with it too often."

CHAPTER XXII.

JEALOUSY OF AMERICA.

Mr. A. Vetch, the popular composer, of whom Mr. F. Beaumont was pleased to make somewhat slighting mention a few chapters ago, and touching whom Miss Clare expressed a juster and more practical opinion, had not been christened America, but Andrew. But he had been so lucky on a Transatlantic trip, during which he had recited an entertainment, with ballads, all over the Union, that in a burst of enthusiasm on the night of a dinner at Delmonico's, given to him on his taking leave, he had vowed thenceforth to wear the name of the great continent that had received him so generously. The Americans, who are the most good-natured as well as the most kind-hearted patrons of any thing like talent that comes from the old country, did not laugh at him, but next day sent him, in a gorgeous gold frame, a beautifully engraved baptismal certificate, in which his hosts of overnight certified, as godfathers, that he was entitled to call himself after the discoverer who has usurped the honors of Columbus. This document, hung up over Mr. Vetch's fire-place in his front drawing-room at Brompton, was regarded by him as his patent of nobility, and when he met with rebuffs in the world, or when he heard of the success of any other composer, he used to console himself by standing before the American testimonial and singing "Hail, Columbia!" in his best manner.

Mr. Vetch had probably some right to claim descent from a still more remarkable race than the Americans, as his handsome face, marked nose, dark eyes, and strong hair testified; but he had very long seen his way out of the truths of Judaism, and had not affiliated himself to any other religion in particular. His apparent relationship, however, to the grand old people afforded much convenience for satire on the part of his rivals, and for persistent chaff on that of his friends. Even Mrs. Vetch, who was indisputably a Christian, and a rather fat one, did not disdain in her wrathful moments, which were frequent, to intimate her regret that she had demeaned herself by an Hebraic alliance, an allegation which was unjust and ungrateful. The haughty Christian house of which she was a child had impartially vended both ham and beef, in fractional portions, to the professors of both faiths, and if, on her gift of voice being discovered, she was taken as bond-slave to a master who was as much of a Christian as a griping, exacting, tyrannical, sordid old professor can be, it was to the instructions of Mr. Andrew Vetch—not then an Americanized institution—that she owed the development of her really great power of song. Moreover, if Mr. Vetch had done her the wrong of marrying her, he had never done her any other, but had labored and toiled for her in the days when her talents were unprofitable, and puffed her, intrigued for her, and wrung capital engagements for her in the time when she began to be recognized. He, moreover, let her keep all the money she earned, and felt himself amply rewarded when she was reasonably pleasant in her treatment of him, a condition of things that did not occur too often to lose the charm we experience from novelties.

There was only one thing in Mr. America Vetch's conduct of which Mrs. Vetch could justifiably complain, and even this a better natured woman might have accepted as a compliment. He was horribly jealous, conjugally. Whether this tendency were derived from his Oriental ancestors, or whether it arose from his experiences and observations of the world, matters not. He was jealous of all the men whom Lauristina Vetch had known in days before he made her acquaintance on purchasing a supper at her father's; he was jealous of all men whom she knew; and he even carried his jealousy to the point of feeling a dislike for men whom she might come to know, or of whom she happened to speak favorably. His faculty of self-torment in this respect embittered his own existence, but he was too kindly a fellow often to visit his troubles on his wife, and he simply made himself privately unhappy and eat his own heart in solitude. Let it be said, at once, that his misery was entirely self-made, and that though his Lauristina was any thing but a good wife in the best sense of the phrase, her morals were unblemished, and her heart was as cold as her singing was impassioned. She would, possibly, have run away from him for a villa in Italy, with a cheap marquis's title annexed, for she was ambitious; but as the cheap marquis did not appear, Lauristina remained an ornament to British matronhood.

To-day Mr. Vetch was in a diversity of troubles. Mrs. Vetch had sung, the night before, at a private house, whose owner had given mu-

sic after dinner, to the rage of most of his male guests, who were debarred from even a cigarette by reason of the women up stairs, as they were profanely called through the grinding teeth of the disappointed sensualists. A young Guardsman had revenged himself on his host, hostess, and all the ladies, by singling out Mrs. Lauristina for the most marked attentions; he had kept by her side the whole night, and had been most elaborately courteous in the way of holding her gloves when she accompanied herself, and of taking charge of her music, and he had even escorted her to her brougham, giving her a parting hand-shake of great affection. In five minutes, of course, and long before he got to the club, he had forgotten her existence; but Mrs. Vetch, whose charms were on the wane, and who was therefore very ready to make the most of what homage she got, had been very much flattered by the behavior of the slightly tipsy young Elegant who had put himself so absurdly in evidence. And in the morning, being in the mood to annoy her husband, she had exultingly detailed the particulars of her conquest, until poor Mr. Vetch looked uncomfortably out of the window at every cab that seemed likely to stop at his door, as if he expected that the Guardsman was coming at ten in the morning, in a hack vehicle, to improve his victory. But beyond a few contemptuous remarks on the probable poverty of a young officer—not a bad hit, by-the-way, Mrs. Vetch's nature being comprehended—the mortified Vetch had not signified displeasure at the flirtation, and had departed to his back drawing-room to compose first himself and then a song. His wife, however, knew, and smiled to know, that though the struck deer had retired to some sequestered part, the lethal reed had gone with him, planted.

"What passion can not music raise or quell?" asked some fool of Jackson, of Exeter, and the true musician answered scornfully unto the sham enthusiast, "What passion can music raise or quell?" Mr. Vetch sat down to the cottage piano—the grand one in the front-room Mrs. Vetch had signified that she wanted—and tried over some ideas. But the melody would not come, and the key-board was touched in vain. Mr. Vetch then cursed the entire British army.

But even this bold measure produced no effect—the great Napoleon more than once took the same course with the same result. Then Mr. Vetch bethought him of his baptismal certificate, and sped to it for consolation; but the hymn to Columbia came flat from his throat, and he felt that he would have soundly scolded a pupil for making such a noise. Next a gleam of a notion came into his head, he went back to the instrument, struck a few notes, and was rewarded, not by a flush of music, but by hearing the word,

"Donizetti."

Mrs. Vetch was passing the half-open door, and hearing her husband trying to do work, amiably cheered him on by a remark given in the cold, scornful, careless tone which hugely aggravates the sensitive, and which had a double poignancy for Mr. Vetch, because, as Lauristina knew, he held that particular composer in much disfavor, perhaps because Mr. Vetch owed him much.

He muttered, in the direction of the voice, a savage word or two, which a wife should have been sorry to think that her husband could ever employ in regard to her; but Mrs. Vetch, though she guessed at their probable character, heeded not, and went on her upward way to deck herself in more tidy garments than those she had thought good enough for her husband's eye at breakfast. He tried again at the tune, and discovered, to his increased wrath, that Mrs. Vetch had been right—he had got upon a recollection of *Betly*. Mr. Vetch then cursed the entire Italian school of composers.

How far he would have gone on, disturbed and helpless, in his series of comminations, it is not easy to say, but just as he thought that he had at length got hold of a tune by the tail a very loud street organ, close to his railings, struck up a music-hall melody, only less vulgar than the words which the cad-author had affixed to it, and which decent folks were not ashamed to recite, grinning at the slang. The enraged musician dashed down stairs and out at the front-door, and without the absurd formality of looking for a policeman, seized the grinding fiend by the collar, and dragged him backward across the street, adding, with a furious gesture, a furious menace in Italian, which Vetch spoke capitally. The dirty and affrighted demon slunk away in ludicrous terror, for Vetch had threatened him with the Evil Eye. The exertion did him good, though Andrew Vetch had never read Matthew Green's poem on the spleen, or been told that,

"Fling but a stone, the giant dies."

Cheered and refreshed, he returned to his dwelling, nor did he much regard a jeer sent down to him from the second-floor:

"If you are mad, you might have some respect for the neighbors."

Mr. Vetch merely cursed the entire street, and then reopened the door, at a ring, and welcomed John Fletcher.

"You seem excited, Vetch," said his friend the dramatist.

"Oh, nothing to speak of, old fellow; and I am so glad to see you," said the warm-hearted composer, shaking Fletcher's hand severely. "Come along up stairs, unless you want to smoke."

"I don't, and I will come up stairs. How is Mrs. Vetch? I heard of her last night. She took all the honors at an awful swell party, I am told."

"Who told you that?" asked Mr. Vetch, in sudden gloom.

"A fellow at the Small Hours' Club: he came in late—we all come in to that club late, by-the-way. He was quite eloquent about Madame's singing and her good looks. I advised

him to come to you on pretense of taking lessons, and I'm not sure that he won't."

Mr. Vetch's look did not promise his possible pupil a very cordial reception, but he recovered his good temper as rapidly as he lost it, and was presently roaring at a story which Fletcher brought him, and rehearsed, as he said, upon Vetch, John being uncertain which way it would tell best—as an anecdote of the Bishop of Wexborough or of Mr. Buckstone.

"However," said Mr. Fletcher, "the best way is to cast the piece according to your company, but I think it tells best with the Bishop in it. Now, are you dreadfully busy, old Vetch? Of course you will say you are, but I have come on business. Stop or go?"

"Stop, of course. I am very busy—that is, I ought to be—for I have a song that I ought to send in to the publisher to-night, but I don't believe it will be done for all that."

"Why, you lazy tune-scorer? Here is only eleven o'clock, and you have all the day before you. I would do an opera in that time if I had any notion of music at all, which I have not."

"You always gave out that you knew a deal about it, and now and then you used to say something that was not absolute nonsense on it when I first knew you."

"Yes, my dear Vetch; but at that time I was the musical critic on a remarkable journal which shall be nameless. As I have given up that sort of thing, I don't mind telling you in confidence that I scarcely know one tune from another, and that I could not hum one to save my long, useless, and evil life."

"And yet you have criticised me!"

"You! I should think so. I have criticised Meyerbeer."

"So you have, by Jove! I remember. I wonder the roof of the opera-box didn't fall in upon you."

"Bless you, my Vetch, don't be superstitious. Tweedle-dum's a grand creature, and Tweedle-dee's a grander; but they are not saints who have got their certificate, and mustn't be spoken about. Clear your mind of cant, my dear Vetch. So you are writing a song. Let's see the words."

"I don't know where they are, exactly."

"What! Making a song without looking at the words?"

"Well, I just looked at them. They are no help."

"Perhaps you can't understand them—that's a thing that will happen to the most gifted of composers. Can't you show them to me? I might expound them."

"Here they are, I believe," said Mr. Vetch, taking out of his breast-pocket a miscellaneous assortment of papers. "Here. No, that's from Mandril, touting for his benefit-concert. Here. No, again, that's from your manager, trying to get off a bargain, which if he does my name's not America Vetch."

"'Tisn't, Andrew."

But the composer pointed solemnly to his baptismal certificate. Then he produced another paper, which proved to be the right one.

"Give us hold," said Fletcher. "A lady's writing. Well, they do write the best songs, because they never put in any ideas, and that you fellows like."

"They write the best songs, Mr. John Fletcher, because they write straight from the heart and to the heart, and don't stop to play with fancies, which spoil passion, Mr. John Fletcher."

"Something in that, too," said the just John. And he read out:

"'*Not Now.*' That's a good title, and as soon as it's out you can do '*But When?*' in answer to the sparkling and popular '*Not Now*,' by the talented and gifted America Vetch. 'A real gem.' *Vide* opinions of press. Shall I write the review of it for you now, to be used when the thing is composed and published?"

"Read the words, can't you?"

"Here we go," said John Fletcher.

"Not now, thou shalt not bid me now
The treasure of my love to tell,
While fame upon thy flushing brow
Proclaims her fight fought hard and well.
Mine own, mine own, how vain to say
My heart thine every triumph shares,
But while the crowd their homage pay
My voice would seem but echoing theirs.

"But, ah! if e'er an hour should come
(Nay, fate hath no such hour in store),
When friends are cold, when praise is dumb,
And those who sought thee seek no more;
When meaner things are prized above
That golden lyre, that seraph pen,
Then, dearest, ask me how I love,
And love me for my answer then."

"Hm!" said Mr. Fletcher. "Not altogether bad, but precious weak in parts, like most things women write. And I say. Golden lyre and seraph pen. Better reverse it, and make the gold pen an advertisement for Mordan. Seraph—what does the child mean? I see. She means a pen plucked from a seraph's wing, but that won't do for the boarding-schools, Vetch; that's profane—women are always profane, even when they mean well. Give me sixpence to alter that line for you."

"It's the best line in the song," said Mr. Vetch, "only seraph's a bad word to sing."

"Try cherub," said John Fletcher. "It wouldn't be more nonsense. Cherubs have wings that would furnish a pen, though they seldom sit down to write."

"What about angel?" demanded the composer, seriously.

"The boarding-schools, I tell you. The keepers thereof are awfully particular about anything that is likely to come under the eye of parents and guardians. However, set your song, and I'll think of a safe line for you. Now can you give me a quarter of an hour for myself?"

"I won't have any body in that room while I am giving a lesson," proclaimed Mrs. Vetch, coming down stairs, and announcing her will to her husband as she would have done to any other of her servants.

"Won't you, mum?" responded Mr. Fletch-

er, in a facetious tone, which brought the lady, smiling, into the apartment; for she recognized his voice, and was rather afraid of him because he was not in the least afraid of her.

Nor, until you looked closely, was there much to be afraid of. Lauristina was a large, handsome woman, fully developed, to say the least of it, with fine bold black eyes, and a red lip which deceived you into a belief that was unfounded. The smile was the made one usual in the concert-room. But if you looked again, which you were rather tempted to do, you saw that the expression was hard, and when you had heard the laugh you did not want to hear it again, and was glad that you were not a child or any thing helpless that could come under the castigation of the laugher.

"Accept my compliments on your brilliant success last night, Mrs. Vetch," said Fletcher, as she shook his hand affectionately.

"Oh! please don't mention it, Mr. Fletcher. I would rather hear nothing about it. Some persons hate to hear that their wife can do any thing creditably."

"Indeed? I hope not," said John Fletcher, somewhat mischievously.

"Mr. Vetch would prefer to be told that I had broken down in an air to learning that it had been well received. I dare say you do not believe it, but it is a fact, and a miserable one for me."

"Any how, you do not look very miserable, I am glad to see, Mrs. Vetch. And I hear that last night you were scattering the most amiable smiles. I only regret that I was not there to catch one."

"It is not business, you know, Mr. Fletcher, to look unhappy before an audience; but people little know the sort of welcome that awaits a woman at home after she has been doing the best for her husband and family."

"Come, Lauristina," said the patient Mr. Vetch, "don't go on saying these things. Any body who does not know me so well as my old friend here might almost believe you."

"If Mr. Fletcher knows you he believes me," said Mrs. Vetch, bitterly, though she did not really feel bitter; she was only malicious.

"I hate you," said John Fletcher, in his heart. But to the lady he said, kindly:

"Why, Vetch must feel himself the hero of the hour when you succeed; and when do you not succeed, Mrs. Vetch? He listens to the art which he had the happiness of teaching you."

"He does nothing of the kind," said Lauristina, sharply. "All he taught me were a few finishing lessons, which I could have got from any body; the ground-work of my musical education was carefully laid before he knew me."

"That is—" but not even the circumstances excused the rude name privately applied by Mr. Fletcher to the statement. "I thought differently," he remarked.

"Of course you did, and so do others; and Mr. Vetch makes a practice of telling every body that he taught me every thing. But I have friends in the press, and one of these days I will have the truth told out, or know the reason why," said Mrs. Vetch.

"Reckon me as one of those friends," said Fletcher, blandly, "and give me the first opportunity of avenging our united wrongs upon that haughty tyrant. But you said that you wished to have the rooms to yourself; pray don't let me be in the way."

"To myself. Oh dear no, Mr. Fletcher. Pray don't suppose I could be so unreasonable as to ask to have the use of my own drawing-room, and my own piano-forte. It was only for the sake of a pupil. I have to give lessons, in spite of all the wonderful success to which Mr. Vetch has helped me. But I will send the young lady away when she comes. It is only losing a valuable connection."

And this was no vain threat. In her exceeding bad humor Mrs. Vetch had more than once dismissed a pupil for the mere sake of being able to say a spiteful thing to her husband. But Fletcher would not hear of it, and forced his host away from the drawing-room and into a small, slovenly snuggery, into which, when too hard pressed for endurance, America Vetch sometimes retreated, and in a humble way sat at bay.

"Why do you torment your wife so shamefully, Vetch?" said Fletcher, with extreme gravity. "I have read that music hath charms to soothe the savage beast—breast—which is it? Be soothed."

"Ah! she is very unkind," said poor Mr. Vetch; "but don't let it go any further. I know she does not mean the things she says, and her temper is really a disease that should be pitied."

He spoke so kindly and so like a man that John Fletcher struggled to suppress the smile which made desperate efforts to break out.

"Bachelors don't understand these things," he said; "but I suppose they are part of the destiny of married men, and that there are secret compensations of which the world knows nothing. Well, now, my beloved musical box, look here. Are you open to do the music for another burlesque?"

"For Mallow?"

"No. Mallow's a humbug."

"Have you only just found that out?"

"Why, we knew it theoretically, of course; and as one has heard it for years from every body who has had any dealings with him, one might have been warned. But you know what fools we all are, and how we believe that though a fellow will do every body else, he will make an exception in our own case. He has not made the exception in the case of Beaumont and me, and there's an end, except that we mean to serve him out. We think we have cut a very pretty cleft stick for his comfort; but I'll tell you another time how we mean to use it. What I have come for is to know whether you'll work with us, and keep all as dark as your own wig."

"It isn't a wig; but I will work with you. You are not bad fellows to get on with, only you are so everlastingly obstinate."

"Well, obstinacy is a bad vice, and we'll correct it for your sake, and not refuse to sacrifice good fun for the sake of getting in your infernal musical effects, which the public don't care a farthing for. Can I put it more frankly or politely?"

"A burlesque is a sort of opera, and ought to have a musical meaning and purpose running all through, if you understand that."

"I understand it in my capacity of ex-musical critic, and I utterly scorn and deride it in my capacity of practical dramatist. But I tell you again you shall be listened to deferentially, submissively, abjectly."

"Then you are awfully sharp-set on getting the piece done, my son," said Mr. Vetch, who had plenty of shrewdness.

"So sharp, my father, that if you had not consented, I should have gone off to another eminent composer without loss of an hour."

"Who, I should like to know?" asked Vetch, eagerly.

"No, Sir. I shall keep that card in hand in case you fail us."

"Did you ever know me break a promise? Come now!"

"Never. You are a brick. But you see that accidents will happen—but, bother! I'll tell you. I should have gone to old Tromper."

Mr. Vetch uttered rather an enormous exclamation, selected from rather a rich *repertoire*, adding, with curious grimace:

"Yes, a nice and lively job of work you'd have got out of that old ass. Besides, he would have told all his acquaintances about it in the course of the morning, and at the end of the week, or sooner, you would have had the satisfaction of reading in half a dozen papers that the theatrical world was on the tip-toe of expectation about a new burlesque, in the preparation of which were enlisted the brilliant talents of Messrs. Beaumont and Fletcher, who were to be congratulated on having a musical ally in that sparkling composer, Mr. Tromper. He keeps such paragraphs in blank in a pigeonhole, to be served up at the shortest notice."

"Bravo, my dear Vetch. Who says that music is not the food of love among musicians?"

"Tromper is an old ass, I tell you."

"We must put up with asses when we can't get horses; but now we've got that Derby favorite, America, so we shall cut every thing out. I will come and see you about it in a day or two, or will you come to us? I've got a pianoforte, such as it is. I believe it is full of wine-bottles at present; but I can take them out, and I dare say they will have imparted a mellowness of tone."

"Well, as you haven't got a line written yet, and perhaps have not even settled on a subject, the appointment can stand over. I'll be ready."

"You are nearly right," laughed Fletcher; "but I believe that a subject has been settled by this time, as I left Frank Beaumont spoiling his morals with Lemprière—a mythological dictionary, Mr. Vetch."

"I have heard of the work, Sir, and that it is nearly as necessary to a dramatist as a French dictionary."

"Sir, there are other mysteries besides those of matrimony," said John Fletcher, who was good humor itself, but who liked to have the last word.

"You need not have come into this dirty hole," said Lauristina, suddenly opening the door. "I have a note postponing the lesson. The drawing-rooms are at your entire service, as I am going out."

"Which way, my dear?" asked Mr. Vetch, meekly.

"I am not sure," replied his wife, as coldly as she could utter the words. "I presume that if I am at home in time for dinner that is sufficient."

"Certainly," said Mr. Vetch, still humble. "I asked only because you might have been able to do something for me; but it is of no consequence—indeed it is better not."

"What did you want done?"

To which the unfortunate Vetch, who had asked exactly and solely because he wanted to know, returned a confused sort of answer about a letter which was not written, at least not satisfactorily, and which had better wait. But he hazarded another shot.

"You are not going near Regent Street, are you, by any accident?"

"I may be, or I may not. Really I can not say. I suppose that your letters can go by the post. I am not inclined to be a commissioner. If I am not at home by dinner-time you need not wait for me. Perhaps I may dine out, and give you time to get over your temper. Good-morning, Mr. Fletcher. I say so now, as I shall not come in here as I go by, for the state of the place is too bad for one's dress."

"I have often asked you, my dear Lauristina, to order it to be cleaned out," said the miserable Vetch, who risked more hard words rather than let her go away without further explanation.

"As if I had any voice in the management of the house!" replied his wife, angrily, and departing with no gentle pull at the door.

"Perhaps we had better go up stairs, as she wishes it," said Mr. Vetch.

His only reason for wishing to go from a room at the back of the house to one looking on the street was to see how his wife was dressed. He believed that she had refused to come in only that he might not see. Yet it was idle trouble that he meant to take. For if Lauristina should be elegantly attired, he would be quite certain that she was going to meet the Guardsman, or some equally superb admirer, and if she should be dowdily arrayed, he would have made up his mind that this was for the purpose of avoiding observation. To be sure, it might be more practical to see whether she turned to the right or to

the left, as in the former case she might be going to pass Pelham Crescent, where dwelt a painter of whose admiration of Mrs. Vetch (entirely imaginary, and the painter had made a cruel caricature of her) Mr. Vetch entertained apprehensions, but not so strong as those which would have revived had she gone toward town, where dwelt at least five men whom he suspected of adoring her, all without the least consciousness on their part that they had merited his suspicion. But then, again, woman is a mass of artfulness, and probably Lauristina would go at first in the opposite direction to that she meant subsequently to take—perhaps would meet an omnibus, get into it, and be borne in secret defiance past the windows of her own house, privately mocking at the man she was deceiving. But, worst of all, that fatal threat to stay out to dinner! She had actually done so a good many times, to Vetch's unutterable worry and dismay, and though, after leaving him in the torments of uncertainty for three or four days, she had carelessly mentioned where she had dined, and there had not been the least harm in it, Vetch, profound student of woman as revealed in novels and the drama, had dark belief that she might not have told the truth, that her female friends were her confederates, and that some assignation or other was at the bottom of all her movements. The odd thing of all was that the poor fellow's jealousy was distributed with such impartial absurdity among a whole group of supposed lovers that he was unwilling to say—nay, he could not make up his own mind—that he ought to lay his hand upon one of the Lotharious gang more than upon another, and he ought to have arrived at one of two conclusions, either that he had no ground for suspicion at all, or that his Lauristina was a multifold opposite of Lucretia. And he did come, alternately, and in a doddering kind of way, to both conclusions, and held them for a little while and in her absence; but when she was with him he could never believe in her frailty, and when she was away the green little demons descended in a swarm and whispered the other decision. Finally, the weak, but good and kind, creature kept all these things to himself, and underwent torments which would have been dissipated by five minutes' talk with a healthy-minded and clear-headed man of the world like John Fletcher, or, better, his married colleague. But while he had a doubt he would not name his Lauristina in connection with possible wrong-doing.

As soon as Fletcher had departed Mr. Vetch sped into the drawing-room, and made pretext of running over the keys. He artfully left the doors open, that he might see his wife come down. By the merest accident, a house-maid, who had something to do on the stairs, came and closed the doors. Of course she had been ordered to do it by Mrs. Vetch. The vigilant husband was not to be so defeated, and he descended into the dining-room, to watch more narrowly than he could do from the windows. He had better have remained; for on the table lay a letter, made up by his wife, and with her monogram on the envelope, but without an address. That made him alternately hot and cold all over. For a moment he resolved to tear it open. It was, no doubt, full of tender words, and perhaps held a sneer at him, and it was to be slipped into somebody's hand with a look for which, addressed to himself, Vetch would have given much gold. But he could not make up his mind to this act, for a storm would ensue; and, besides, if it should confirm his suspicions, the hour of hours had come. He hit on the feeble thought of placing the letter behind the looking-glass, and thus letting it be lost, until some future time. Before he could decide on this step the housemaid came in for the letter, and took it away from under his eyes, of course to give it to her mistress. Finally, Mrs. Vetch went out without turning into any room, and he drew back from the window, but watched. Lauristina seemed uncertain which way to go, and he forgot the fact that uncertainty was part of her nature, except when roused to annoy him, when she went direct to the mark. She was, no doubt, he said, speculating on the best way to avoid notice. She was plainly dressed: there was nothing remarkable, except that he saw a piece of red velvet in her bonnet, and somebody—who was it?—had told her that he was very fond of red velvet. This was a compliance with the taste of some admirer, and Mr. Vetch instantly imagined the glance with which she would say that she had remembered what somebody had said about red velvet. At length she turned to the left, and was seen no more. She had gone to London, to that haunt of evil men. He was miserable, and in that delightful state of mind he retired to the drawing-room to compose the song in which the wife tenderly prays to offer silent love until an hour should come when her consoling words shall be needed.

We can not help poor America Vetch out of his troubles, but it is due to his wife and to her respectable domestic to say that the visit which the former went to pay was to her sister-in-law, with whom she meant to have out an old grievance based on Christmas-day and certain omitted invitations; and that the latter, in fetching out the letter, was not acting an unworthy part in assisting her mistress's errors, but was simply taking away a prescription, to be made up at the chemist's at the corner, and which Mrs. Vetch did not choose that her servants should read. Let right be done.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MUSIC OF THE PEOPLE.

"Pooh, pooh! there is nothing particular the matter with you," said Mr. Dudley. "Of course I could frighten you, and tell you that a shaky hand, and depressed spirits, and aversion to business, and all that you describe, mean a

breaking up of your constitution, and it would be business in me to say so. Go round into the next square, and give a guinea to my neighbor, Dr. Bluestone, and he will tell you all that and more, and solemnly desire you to see him again, bringing another guinea, this day week. But that's not my way. You have told me your symptoms very clearly, and also their cause. I'll give you a tonic which you may as well take. But the case is in your own hands. You must go to bed a little earlier and a good deal straighter."

We have once seen, but only for a few minutes, the young gentleman to whom this counsel was given by Mr. Dudley in his little back surgery. We saw Mr. Farquhar in the small crowd that surrounded the body of Barton, the tiler, in the square at Gray's Inn. It was then said that he was serving his articles to one of the firms of solicitors there, that he was a very well-dressed young gentleman, and that he piqued himself on his nerve, and went with medical students to see operations. But Mr. Farquhar was much changed. He was now carelessly, not to say meanly dressed, his hair had grown long, and lay feebly about, pertinaciously descending upon his rather good forehead, and his pleasant but weak face was pale and despondent. In the former days he had been noted for a high merry laugh, and a very ready and smart utterance; but he certainly did not laugh during his interview with Mr. Dudley, and he detailed his afflictions in a sketchy but lachrymose fashion.

"You think it's nothing but that," he said, as if somewhat dissatisfied that the medical man did not think the case a solemn one.

"I am sure it is nothing but that, Farquhar, if a professional man ought ever to be sure of any thing. The music of the people has been too much for you."

"How do you mean?"

"Those abominable music-halls and dancing places. Don't let me abuse them, for they are my best friends, and I wish there was one in every street. But you keep out of them, as you young fellows can do nothing in moderation. You may do a great deal. You may drink plenty of bad spirits, you may smoke half a dozen bad cigars, you may sit up in a vile atmosphere till midnight; but if you will do all these things at once, and do them most nights in the week, the result will be just what I see before me."

"I suppose you are right," said Mr. Farquhar, languidly.

"If you are not certain of it you had better go to somebody else," said Mr. Dudley, rather roughly.

Mr. Farquhar, being in a weak state, colored with annoyance at being sharply spoken to; but he did not resent the offense.

"The fact is," he said, "a fellow doesn't know what to do with himself after business hours."

"And so he does away with himself," said the helper of men. "I have read of a schoolmaster who killed himself because he could not find out why the genitive of Zeus should be Dios, and I've heard of somebody else who killed himself because he was weary of buttoning and unbuttoning; but these were sensible men compared to fellows who poison themselves slowly because they can't read a book."

"One can't be always reading. I read sometimes. But I can't interest myself in books."

"Haven't you got an examination to pass?"

"O Lord, yes! Don't talk about it. If it were next week I should break down slap; in fact, I would not go up. But it is five months off, and I shall have plenty of time to cram for that."

"I don't advise a man about his own trade," said Mr. Dudley, "any more than I would let him advise me about mine. You know best, but I should not care about employing the services of a solicitor who had got into the profession by a cram."

"Isn't it done in your trade?"

"Yes, it is; and in consequence there are hundreds of ignorant asses doing splendid mischief all over the country. I come after them sometimes, and see their blessed handiwork. However, it keeps down the population, and that's a good thing in these days."

"Well, I will do my best. I suppose you don't want me to shut myself up altogether."

"Of course I don't," returned Mr. Dudley, savagely. "Do you take no regular exercise—I don't mean dancing in those dens, but honest hard walking?"

"I haven't danced for weeks. I don't seem to care about it. Yes, I walk—not a great deal, perhaps, but I do."

"Live in Judd Street, don't you?"

"Yes, my lodgings are there."

"Of course you walk in to business. A grand pedestrian feat of half a mile."

"Nearer three quarters," said Mr. Farquhar.

"No, is it though?" asked Mr. Dudley, mockingly. "Well, you perform that, and I trust that you won't feel the effect in after-life?"

"Yes, generally, if I am not late at breakfast or it is not wet."

"And walk home at night from your places of amusement?"

"Not so often—I thought it wasn't wholesome after being so long in hot air."

"But on Sundays, as the march of enlightened philanthropy has not yet opened the music-halls to the people on that day, you take a jolly gook bracing walk of eight or ten miles, Hampstead way, or somewhere?"

"Well, I don't care about walking on Sundays."

"Religious scruples, perhaps."

"I should think not. But it seems so caddish—like snobs who can go out on no other day. Sometimes I go to the Zoological Gardens."

"I wonder they let you out again instead of caging you up as a companion to the sloth. If you were in spirits to be chaffed I should tell you that you were a damned fool."

"That's not chaff, but rudeness, Dudley," said Mr. Farquhar, plucking up a little spirit.

"Very well; but it's true, as Ben Jonson said about something else. But I didn't want to hurt your feelings, only to rouse you up. I have told you that there is nothing particular the matter with you, but there will be a precious deal if you don't pull up. Cut all those night places—go to the theatre now and then, if you like—and manage a walk every day, and a good one on Sundays. Bigger swells than you are glad to do that, my boy, I can tell you, for I meet them."

"Ah?" asked Mr. Farquhar, with some interest.

"Yes; men you'd be proud to know, men who are talked about in society," replied the doctor, seeing that the argument had weight, and putting some contempt into his voice in consequence.

"I will think of what you say," said the patient. And he glanced at his own dress, and thought that he must get himself up more becomingly if he were to walk forth and encounter notables. The keen-eyed Dudley saw this also.

"Yes, and I say, excuse the hint. I'm a pig, and my costume is no matter, but you are a gentleman who should look like one. I take it you have tick at your tailor's—if not, establish one with somebody else's; for you do yourself no justice in that seedy rig out. A lady of my acquaintance, who moves in the best society, knows you by sight, and told me one day that you would be taken for Lord Cecil Gapington, the member for Yawnleigh, you are so like him, if you did not dress so carelessly."

This was, of course, an invention of the minute; but it completed Mr. Farquhar's conversion to good resolves, besides making him feel pleasantly toward his rough Mentor, who indeed had deserved his gratitude, thus far, by talking good sense to him, and giving him sound counsel. Mr. Dudley then went into his shop, in which were two or three customers, of whom he speedily disposed, abusing a poor woman for asking for pills for a boy whom she had not brought with her; selling a box of patent medicine to another with the not very encouraging assurance that he did not know what was in them, but that very likely they would do her no harm, and that if they did she could come again; making a lad buy a hideously hard tooth-brush for his mother, though she had, as he pleaded, specially ordered him to bring a soft one; and then with a general hint to Mr. Cubb Spitty, who for once happened to be diligently minding his business, that he had better go on with that duty, Mr. Dudley mixed what is known as a "pick-me-up" for Mr. Farquhar, and promptly administered the same.

"Yes," said the pale young gentleman, as he swallowed the reviving liquor, "these things do me good when nothing else does."

"Oh, you are in the habit of taking them, are you? I might have guessed as much. Well, don't take any more, mind that."

But Mr. Farquhar hesitated to promise this, for in truth no day passed without his having recourse to some such stimulant.

"Well, you can do as you like, you know," said Mr. Dudley, "but one of these days you'll wish you had shown more sense. By-the-way," he said, as if the idea had just struck him, "was any thing ever done in your Inn for that poor woman whose husband was killed by the fall from your house?"

"It was not our house. It was from the house opposite us. Wimperley and Blamper on the ground-floor."

"Oh, was it so? I fancied it was your people's. You were in the crowd at the time, I remember, and so that put it into my head."

"We did not speak. I did not know you."

"Nor I you till afterward; but you looked like a gentleman—a good deal smarter than you do now—and you were standing out from the others, as if you were going to operate on the man, only you were good enough to give way to me."

"Yes. I remember that you were in a bitter bad temper."

"I was not: but I find that manner answers best with the sort of patients I have chiefly to deal with. If you are civil, and let them talk, they twaddle your head off. Was there a subscription for that woman?"

"Yes, something was raised. I did not give any thing."

"No," said Benjamin Dudley, looking at him fixedly. "You did well, of course, to keep yourself entirely out of the whole business."

"What was it to me?"

"I tell you," repeated Mr. Dudley, significantly, "that in not even putting your name to the subscription you showed more sense and caution than perhaps I expected from you."

"I don't understand."

"Oh yes, you do," said Dudley, with something of a sneer.

"I repeat that I don't in the least see your drift, Dudley. The subscription was no business of mine, and I have plenty of use for my money without giving it away; so I passed the paper on."

"And I repeat that you did wisely. But you have not shown as much wisdom since. If people want to keep secrets a good way is to keep the mouth shut."

"Well?"

"Yes, you are prudent enough now, but the stable door—you know the proverb. You should have been cleverer, my young gentleman. You might have sat quite quiet, or you might have played certain good cards; but now you have thrown away the cards, and it is more than likely that you will not be allowed to sit quiet."

"I have not the faintest idea what you are talking about. Is this another pick-me-up, to rouse me up, as you said? Because I have had enough of that, thank you, and if you will kindly make up the tonic you mentioned I will go back to the office."

"What's your father, Farquhar?" demanded Mr. Dudley, suddenly and sharply.

"He lives in York. What's that to you?" in his turn asked the other.

"I know that; but what is he?"

"He is in trade, if it is of any consequence to you to know," replied young Mr. Farquhar, again coloring.

"There is trade and trade. Howell and James are in trade. So is that little Jew silversmith in the half-shop over the way. Are you ashamed to say what your father's business is?"

"No; but I don't see what right you have to ask any questions about my family. I am not wanting to marry one of your daughters," continued Farquhar, with a rather weak jocosity, intended to soften the effect of his more spirited reply.

"I have no daughters that I know of," said Dudley, grimly. "But as you mention marriage, I suppose it has been running in your head since you got hold of a secret which you could not keep?"

"I must go back to the office," said Farquhar, looking at his watch.

"No, you won't," said Dudley; "at least, not just yet. They won't be missing you, I dare say. You have not been making yourself so useful and indispensable of late as to be constantly wanted by your employers."

"How do you know?"

"Why, only by looking at you I can tell that you are not much good for business at present. But I know another way. You have had a severe wigging for letting some work get into arrear, and you need not take the trouble to deny that, because I can tell you the very day, which," said Mr. Dudley, opening an account-book of his own, and running his finger along some dates, "was last Tuesday, the 13th instant."

Mr. Farquhar's instinct, for he had learned something in Gray's Inn, was at once to look at the item at which Mr. Dudley's finger had stopped, in order to discover the name of the customer who might have supplied him with the information. Mr. Dudley was going to bang the book together, with a taunting laugh, when he changed his mind, and said:

"You can look, if you like, but the entry will tell you nothing. I don't leave the secrets of patients to be found out by shopmen and menials—some professional men do. Those words mean the name of the person who told me of your misfortune, but they won't tell it you. Look, I say, if you like."

"I don't want to know what scoundrel in the office comes chattering to you; but if I find out I will kick him," said Mr. Farquhar, angrily.

"Well, put yourself into kicking condition first, my friend, as you might not get the best of such a business just now."

"I should hardly have thought that you, as a professional man, would have listened to such a cad."

"Never mind about that. Why can't you tell me what your father is? It is fair to tell you that I can't find his name in the county directory among the Nobility, Gentry, or Clergy."

"No, you won't," snapped Farquhar.

"Nor among the persons engaged in trade."

"Very likely not. I never looked into it."

"That is—an error of memory, for when the bran-new blazing-red directory came into your employers' office this year you searched carefully through the York part."

"Your spy serves you well, Dudley; but it's dirty work."

"That's his affair. What's your father?"

"He lends money, if you must know. Do you want to borrow any? Because it is of no use applying through me—we have no communication whatever on business matters."

"No, you had a row with him about something which you refused to do, because you thought it was not work for a gentleman. I fancy that, in the present state of your finances, your father might find you more filial and obedient."

"Dudley," said the young man, angrily, "for some reason you have been taking great interest in my affairs. Of course I can't help that. But I advise you to let them alone."

"But you are not qualified to give advice yet, my friend," said Dudley, laughing, "and you never will be unless you repent and read. So consider the counsel as not given, and I will take no advantage of the illegality if you behave yourself. But don't try to bully me, because that game won't do. It happens that I have got the right to talk to you, and also that I have the will."

"I am out of sorts, Dudley, and you know it, or you might think twice before speaking to me in this way."

"You would kick me? Well, get well and strong, and then try. Meantime, what harm am I doing you? I have given you the best professional advice I could, better than you could buy of Dr. Bluestone for a guinea, and I am trying to give you some social advice also; but you receive it devilish ungraciously. I told you it was a bad thing to let your tongue run away with you."

"When have I been doing that?"

"Can't you remember? Do you often take slight acquaintances into your confidence?"

"Never, if I know it."

"But when you don't know it?"

"Do you mean when I have taken too much?"

"Yes, I mean that. You need not blush so painfully, though in the present state of your nerves you can hardly help it. There's no crime in taking too much. I very often do, and I certainly shall to-night. But then I don't let out things, as you do, it seems."

"Well, what have I let out? Let me hear," said Mr. Farquhar, with an oath.

"You might have meant to tell it for what I know," replied Dudley; "but if you did I can't account for your conduct. You were, on a certain night, and I can tell you when, if you want to compare the date with your diary—I suppose

you keep up your private diary, if you neglect that of your employers—you were in the front of the gallery of a certain music-hall over the water. Perhaps you were in a gushing kind of mood, between weakness, and drink, and music. Any how, you entered into the most amicable conversation with the person sitting next to you, and both of you became confidential in the extreme as you proceeded with your refreshments. Now, when a person of the lower class in life comes before a magistrate and begins his idiotic confession that he was gaping at the steamboats at London Bridge, and a young man, who was also gaping at them, remarked what a wonderful thing is steam, and what a deal of business is done at them wharves sure-ly, and the profundity of his remarks and his general affability induced the complaining booby to accept a glass of ale, and then he was robbed, why, we say that he is a pitiable donkey, and that it is a waste of good law to use it in behalf of such fools. But when an educated young gentleman, a lawyer, makes himself tipsy, and goes into a low haunt to make revelations to the first stranger who comes to sit by him, what do we say then, Mr. Farquhar?"

"Say that he is a hundred times a greater fool than the other. It is of no use pretending that I have not been tipsy several times lately, and I did not always recollect how I got home; though, as I always did, I can not have been very far gone. But if I were on my oath, I can't recollect saying any thing in particular, and as for letting out secrets, I don't believe a word of it, particularly as I have got none to let out."

"Nothing about our father in York, for instance?"

The young man became paler than ever.

"No, Dudley; that won't do. Nothing about him would ever cross my lips if I were in the wildest state of intoxication. Nothing did, and I defy you to make me believe it."

"You did not say any thing about Mr. Farquhar?"

"I tell you I did not."

"And your conviction that you could not does credit to your filial sympathies."

"Hold your tongue on that. I will not speak about my father."

"It may not be necessary. But will you tell me whether your conversation, on one of these gushing nights, ever took a turn like this—we won't swear to the exact words, but you will find enough in the meaning to engage your best attention?"

Mr. Dudley, like his companion, had been standing—Farquhar because he wished to go away, Dudley in order to prevent him. But now Mr. Dudley sat down across a chair with its back toward Farquhar, and looked up intently into the face of the latter.

Dudley, let it be said, was entirely master of himself. But he was now closely approaching a moment for which he had long been preparing, and which would either be one of the golden moments of his life, or would baffle a deeply-laid scheme on which he had built strange hopes. Therefore, although he assumed an air of calm superiority, his own heart was beating faster than that of the dilapidated creature whom he was subjecting to his inquisition.

"Farquhar," he said, "it does not much matter how a conversation between a tipsy person and a person who was not so was brought round to the point which you reached. But it may help your memory to say that there might have been some general talk about music-halls and similar places, and how they helped the nights along, and this got on into a maudlin groove about men who had no homes to go to, though they sighed for domestic life."

"Yes," said Farquhar, "I have more than once talked bosh of that kind, I am afraid."

"Then," said Dudley, slowly, as if he were using language which he had thought over and learned, "you may have said that you were weary of that sort of night rambling, and that one of these days, if you did not do better, you would take a humble set of chambers in one of the Inns of Court, and live after the fashion which Beranger—you broke into tender eulogy of Beranger, and begged and prayed your companion to study him—"

"I feel that this is true. What a fool I am!"

"You talked affectingly of the happy life of student and grisette, and your companion reminded you that England was not France."

"I dare say," said Farquhar, wincing frightfully under the detail of his folly.

"To which you responded, 'Don't tell me. Such things are done in England, done in London, done in Gray's Inn.'"

Something began to dawn upon Farquhar's memory, and he became visibly agitated. But the other, increasing, if possible, the sternness of his gaze, went on.

"You said, in answer to doubts which your friend threw in, that you could prove your words. And after a little more liquor, and a little renewed provocation, you blurted out—eagerly swearing a total stranger to secrecy—that on a certain occasion you had looked through an opera-glass at a window in a certain square, and you had recognized the face of a lady whom you knew in society."

Farquhar grasped at the chair-back for support.

"You are not going to tell me that I gave a name," he stammered, piteously.

"*You did.*"

Farquhar gazed at him for a moment, and then, staggering back to the little sofa, sat down and cried like a child.

But Benjamin Dudley, though he was not habitually unkind except at need, and although his professional habits would almost have told him, by instinct, to do something to relieve the agitation which he witnessed, had, for the moment, no word of kindness, no thought of help. He continued to gaze hard at Farquhar, and had there been any one to read Dudley's face

as he was reading that of the younger man, a fierce, unsatisfied expression would have been manifest to the spectator. He left Farquhar but few minutes to recover himself, and then asked, in a hard voice:

"What do you think of your conduct?"

Farquhar's reply of savage self-reproach need not be set down, but it was not too strong a denunciation of the behavior described by Dudley.

"Yes, I think you are," said Dudley, mercilessly. "I don't know that one could expect better things from the son of a Yorkshire money-lender, but he might have been shrewder."

To this insult the unfortunate Farquhar made no reply.

"Well, have you nothing more to say?" asked Dudley, who was becoming curiously excited.

"What the devil can I say?" the other flung at him, rather than answered him.

"That you will have to settle, if not in the first instance with the person you have last named, and with your father at York, who may possibly be almost as pleasant a party to meet as the other under the circumstances."

"My father!"

"Yes; for you are not of age. And if you were, I take it that you are not in a position to pay the tremendous damages which the lady's friends are going to demand for your slander."

"An action!"

"Does that seem so unnatural a course to a young attorney? Ah! I see you have a gleam of hope touching insufficient evidence. I tell you at once, out of kindness, that you may abandon that hope. You have not heard half of what I can tell you, nor half about the witnesses who will be brought forward."

"Don't tell me any thing more at present. I am horribly ill. But something must be done. My father must never hear of this."

"You are thinking more of your father and his anger than of the character of the poor lady whom you have slandered."

"But it is not slander," gasped Farquhar. He was crushed, ill, weak, bewildered, and the words escaped him without his noticing all their meaning. Dudley's eyes glared like a wolf's when food is held before him, but just beyond his reach.

"Do you propose to justify what you said?" he asked, slowly. "Because, if you fail, another cipher will be added to the damages your father must pay. An attorney's clerk imputes the worst of morals to a lady of good position in society—what does a jury usually say to him?"

"I must and will have time to think over this," said Farquhar, helplessly. "I must have sleep. I have had very little lately. In the morning I shall have my head clear."

"Under other circumstances, that is exactly the advice I ought to give you," said his tormentor. "But I am bound to tell you that time is very precious, and it may be fatal to delay action. I think, after various things which I have told you to-day, that you believe I know what I am talking about. A letter from a firm which you know very well, and which has a reputation for never sparing any body, will be forwarded to your father by this night's mail. He may not be in the York Directory, but he will have the letter at breakfast to-morrow."

"It must not be—it shall not be!" cried the poor young Farquhar. "I will see them myself; I will prevent it."

"You know best what sort of entreaties are likely to succeed with the respectable firm of ——." He named a house notorious for severe, not to say sharp practice.

"They! And I have a personal quarrel with their managing man."

"You see you can't prevent that application to Mr. Farquhar. The best thing to think is how to soften the matter. Will he take it so dreadfully to heart?"

"You don't know him—you don't know any thing—the letter must not go. My God! what a fool I have been!" And again he broke out into a passion of crying.

Dudley rose slowly, considered for a minute at least, and then went to the young man and laid a hand on his shoulder, and Farquhar showed his miserably nervous condition by a start.

"I can't see this," said Dudley. "I am a rough fellow, but I hate to see suffering. I can find no excuse for your conduct; it would be base hypocrisy in me if I said that I could. You must feel that you have behaved like a blackguard. Don't you?"

"I have said so already."

"Well, you can hardly humiliate yourself lower; and I think if you don't mind signing an apology and retractation—I don't deceive you, it must be very complete and abject—something may be done, at all events in the way of gaining time. It is your father whom you chiefly fear."

"If I could only keep it from him."

"There is just this chance of doing it. First, you must sign—in fact," said Dudley, emphatically, "you must *write* the most ample and humble document we can find words for, and then I will do what I can for you. It happens that the second partner in that sharp firm owes me a good turn. Of course I can't ask him to accept your apology and stay the action; but I think I can get him to give us a few days, while his clients are consulted. Only, again, if you are inclined to deny point-blank that you ever said any thing of the sort, you must not make an apology, but you must write to York to tell your father to bid the sharp house his defiance."

"Let me write the retractation," said Farquhar, to whom the last words brought new agitation, "and do you do your best for me. Somehow and sometime I will make it up to you."

"I am sure you will," said Dudley. "And you are not the first man, nor will you be the last, to make a fool of himself with drink. Let us knock out the letter."

"Write it for me, and I will copy it," said Farquhar. "My hand shakes so that I can hardly do any thing."

"No," said Dudley, quietly. "I am a bad composer of such things, and I have another reason for wishing to be able to say that the apology was all your own. There are writing materials, and I will leave you for a bit. Only don't lose time; better say too much than too little."

"One word," said Farquhar, as the other was going out. "Think for me, for I am in a whirl. Whom should I address—not the lady herself, surely?"

Again came that wolfish glare in Dudley's eyes. Again he mastered himself, and he said, gravely:

"No. That would be in bad taste. Address it to her friends generally, and offer any more formal document that may be demanded."

And he closed the door, and came out to minister to his customers. Several for whom Mr. Spitty's attentions sufficed had come and gone; others who wished to see Mr. Dudley had been dismissed, for Mr. Spitty, daring as he was, knew better than to intrude upon his dread master when that surgery-door was shut. To a few who lingered, and welcomed Mr. Dudley's entrance, he was singularly courteous and forbearing. The assistant could by no means comprehend the sudden change that had come over his master, but privately hoped that some misfortune was about to occur to him. Once, however, when Mr. Spitty was near realizing his own hope by careless treatment of a valuable bottle, Mr. Dudley turned upon him with a look and a word that convinced the youth that his employer was simply keeping down his bad temper for some purpose. Mr. Spitty, therefore, was warned, and could comfort himself only by secretly muttering little prayers, wildly and variously addressed, that whatever Mr. Dudley desired might not come to pass.

These petitions, like those of many great men of old, were lost in empty air.

When, a quarter of an hour from leaving Farquhar, Mr. Dudley returned to him, a well-filled page of writing lay before the young man. Dudley's gaze fastened upon it, and he could scarcely wait for Farquhar's question, as he handed the paper to his adviser:

"Will this do?"

Dudley read it, or rather glanced over it with lightning speed. Had Farquhar been well and on the alert he might have wondered at the rapidity with which he was answered:

"Every thing is in it that I could wish to see there. Copy it instantly."

While Farquhar did so Dudley took up a book—a volume of poetry of the mildest sort, and read page after page with a pleased expression on his face. There were not many ideas in the poems, and of the few not one went to the brain of Dudley, whose eyes ran over the words, but whose mind was far away.

The document was soon transcribed.

"Now, Farquhar," said Mr. Dudley, kindly, "you go home. I will send a note to the office, mentioning that you have been taken ill. And before night I will let you know the result of my mission. I think you may hope. I will also send you a sleeping-draught. But do have a little sense, my good fellow. If young men only knew what a treasure they have in a good constitution, and how bitterly they will regret playing with it, they would enjoy their youth with more moderation, and then they would have a healthy, or, at least, a venerable old age. Don't drink, don't smoke, don't sit up to excess. We will soon have you all right, never fear. Don't think of any thing rude which I may have said to you, but think only that I want to do my best for you. And now go away, and go straight home, and wait there until you hear from me."

With which kind and sensible address he turned Farquhar out of the shop. With a much less kind address to Mr. Spitty the eccentric medical man ordered him to put up the shutters and take himself off. Mr. Spitty naturally stared, but desisted from that demonstration on the command being repeated in a low voice which he feared more than any thunder. He fixed up the shutters, and hoped that his master was going to be bankrupt. And he had the great pleasure of insulting a customer, to his employer's detriment, by slamming the door in her indignant face. Then he went away.

Mr. Dudley indulged in no personal demonstrations at all. A success that we have long desired, and that at last comes to us, often finds us disposed to receive it very quietly, contrary to our own expectations of the effect. He scarcely looked at the document or the copy, but left them lying on the table while he complacently smoked a pipe.

"It was a near thing, and nearly missed," he said. "Bless the music-halls and the drink. If he had been a nerve stronger he would have beaten me. Now I have only to piece two pleasant stories, and *then*—"

We leave the good doctor to his pipe of self-gratulation. Only, if it should be asked why he was so eager for the written apology, it shall be answered—

Because he lied in saying that Farquhar, in his cups, had mentioned a lady's name. The rest of the story of the young man's conduct was true. The story about sharp solicitors was, of course, a myth.

And Dudley has the name now. The gods, as we have already said, were tired of the benevolent amusement of seeing a good man struggling with difficulties.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STREETS OF NAYBURY.

Though Naybury awaited with much interest the return of the Conways, who were to bring the Dormers with them for installment in

their home, that meritorious town was not entirely unconcerned with its own scandals. It had soon ceased to be a secret that a deputation from the Dorcas Society was to attend at Saxbury, and deliver the opinion of the Serious in Naybury upon the sad heterodoxy of the rector's son. The worldly in the town, though they had no particular hesitation in saying, among themselves, that the idea of dispatching such a mission to Saxbury was outrageously impertinent, nevertheless hypocritically affected to approve it when any of the Dorcas ladies were within hearing. The motive for this was twofold. It arose in part from the natural desire to see the dullness of Naybury enlivened by a proceeding which would cause considerable and prolonged excitement, and partly from the belief that the rector of Saxbury, if once brought to bay, would inflict a tremendous castigation upon his censors, whose extraordinary goodness was not pleasant to a number of Naybury people.

It was very unfairly said by some who might have been expected to know better, and did, that the delay in the movement upon Saxbury was caused by Mrs. Bulliman's having "thought better of it," that is to say, by that excellent lady's courage having failed her. But this unworthy suggestion was perhaps hazarded only for the purpose of stimulating her to the onset. The notion had been traced to the chemist, Mr. Chervil, whose skepticism had been so clearly proved by Mrs. Bulliman, on the ground that he had spoken of the "Mosaic" account of the creation, and who therefore was an atheist, or about to become one. This unhappy man had said to Mrs. De Gully, a lady of the neighborhood (and herself rather given over to the demon of geology, when there were no majors or the like to flirt with at Martletowers, her absentee husband's seat), that it would probably be known in due time that Mr. Bulliman had saved his wife's credit by objecting to the proposed visit. Mrs. De Gully, with a painful levity, had authorized Mr. Chervil to say that if Mr. Grafton were persecuted in the manner intended, an address of condolence should be presented to him, and she should be happy to be the first to sign it. Those who are fortunate enough to be acquainted with such places as Naybury will have little difficulty in believing that from Mr. Chervil's, which was a sort of tacitly recognized mart of small talk, this defiance was speedily carried into the Dorcas camp. Mrs. Bulliman heard of it, and though conscious of no shortcomings on her own part, she deemed it due to her supporters to explain that the reason why the enterprise against the Graftons had been delayed was that Mr. Abbott, the lawyer, was sojourning with the rector, and Mrs. Bulliman added a few mysterious words, which were interpreted to mean, as she intended that they should be, that while Mr. Grafton was in the midst of legal and pecuniary difficulties it was not the time to attack him in reference to his son's contempt for missionaries. But Mrs. Bulliman, though zealous, was prudent enough to take care that no one should be able to quote such a statement as her own. Her husband, who was the mildest of solicitors, had once been compelled, in her younger days, to give her such a tremendous warning against testifying to the truth in a way unfavorably regarded by the law of libel, that she had learned to restrain her Christian denunciations within safe limits. Nevertheless, one morning, about the time when the higher classes of Naybury came out, and the neighboring folks drove in, Mrs. Bulliman repaired to the Chervil exchange, ready to accept any battle that might be offered.

Previously, however, Mrs. Bulliman had been irritated, for disaffection had broken out in her own house. Miss Phœbe Bulliman, who had never been so docile as her sister Sophia, and of whose early sins we and those persons present heard something at the Dorcas meeting, had perfectly well understood on what errand her mother was going, and had desired to be left at home. She knew better than to urge the unconverted young lady's insincere excuse of a headache, for the thin, grim, wiry maiden had never had an hour's illness since the time when she nearly killed herself by engaging, with characteristic obstinacy, in a fight with the paroxysms of the hooping-cough. Moreover, she knew that such an excuse would not serve her, for Sophia, who really was bilious and headachy, was often ordered to remember that such thorns in the flesh (an unkind phrase, for she had very little of the latter) must be borne, and not allowed to interfere with duty. Therefore, Phœbe, nerving herself for the act, had signified in a straightforward manner that she would not go out.

"Before saying another word, Phœbe," her mother had replied, calmly, "you will tell me your reason for objecting."

"My reason, mamma, is, that I have considered every thing that was said at the last Dorcas meeting, and I have decided, I hope not without good grounds, that what was then agreed upon was a mistake."

"That the entire body, many of them much older than yourself, and one of them your mother, made a mistake, and that Phœbe Bulliman is right?"

"I have yet to learn," said Phœbe, who read the debates, "that one person is bound to sacrifice a conviction because it is held by many. And I am too old, mamma, to be spoken to in the style of the dialogues in children's books."

"Nobody knows better how old you are than I do, Phœbe, though few know so well how imperfectly you have improved seven-and-twenty precious years."

Seven-and-twenty! It sounded needlessly emphatic and unkind, Phœbe thought, and her mother might just as well have said twenty-seven.

"It is not for me to speak of myself," she said; "but at all events I am old enough to be allowed to take my own course in a matter of this kind. You are going out, mamma, in the hope of meeting somebody who does not approve the way in which you intend to treat the Graftons,

and I request you to spare me the pain of standing by to hear things said to you which I could not contradict."

"I am surprised—bitterly surprised, Phœbe, at this subterfuge. A rebellious spirit I might pardon, but the pretense that affection for me teaches you to disobey my wishes is a piece of hypocrisy so fearful that it makes me tremble for my child."

Now this speech, coming from an ordinary mother, who was not in the habit of being solemn and menacing on light occasions, might have brought an ordinary daughter to her parent's arms in tears. But among a certain class stern denunciation is so usual an instrument of domestic rule that it often fails to tell, and Phœbe must not be supposed to have been an undutiful young person because she remained in her chair, and did not even drop "Smooth Stones from Ancient Brooks," which she had been reading, with gratitude to Mr. Spurgeon for airing Mr. Brooks's jewels.

"Yes, mamma," said Phœbe, quietly. "But I wish to stay at home."

"I shall not ask you twice to accompany me. I shall not now give expression to my feelings as to your conduct. It must be considered by me in silence in my chamber. But I will ask you one thing: Do you suppose that I am deceived as to your motives, Phœbe?"

"No, mamma, I hope not; because I have told you what they are."

"You have told me what they are!" repeated Mrs. Bulliman, with a tone of scornful reproach. "You have not. But I will tell you what they are, and deeply am I wounded at your want of self-respect. You need not assume that look of pretended surprise. I know you, and your heart. You wish me to abstain from giving offense to the Graftons, and you wish it because you have still a hope, a contemptible hope, that Edward Grafton may yet be brought to think of you. Answer that to your own conscience, if not to me, Phœbe."

"You have no right to say this, mamma."

"I have a right to say what I please to my own child," began Mrs. Bulliman; but the seven-and-twenty years were palpably before her, and she could not help feeling that scolding was rather out of date. She controlled her anger, and said, "You are afraid to answer, and you need not. Stay at home. But keep your own counsel, Phœbe," she added, for she was a good mother after all. "You have as much chance of becoming Edward Grafton's wife as you have of preaching in his pulpit. Though you are so much wiser than your mother, you may believe this: Edward Grafton never had a thought for you, and he loved another person, of whom I trust he has learned to think no longer, but do not you therefore encourage any vain hopes. You had better retire to your room and ponder over what I have said, and then you will perhaps be prepared to meet me in a more becoming manner in the afternoon."

Mrs. Bulliman went out. Her language to Phœbe had been as hard and as severe as that of a judge with a culprit. But it would be a mistake to suppose that there was any want of true and motherly affection. There were no sacrifices, there was no hard work which, had fortune made it necessary, Mrs. Bulliman would not have at once undertaken for her children, and steadily persevered in to the end. But she had been taught that authority was the true government for the household, and having herself an innate love of command, she had preferred absolute sway to gentler influences, and had found no difficulty in satisfying herself, theologically, that she was right.

Phœbe had not much more attention for Ancient Brooks that day; but the plant of hope, when it has taken any root in a bosom that has beaten for seven-and-twenty years, is not plucked out at the first tug, and Phœbe was not altogether crushed. If it were not intruding into her secrets too far, it might be hinted that possibly a thought of a very worldly kind indeed interfused itself among higher aspirations. Miss Phœbe Bulliman knew that her own father was rich, and believed that Edward Grafton's father was not so. If ruin should come upon Saxbury, how sweet to think that the young clergyman might be saved from all trouble of the world if he did but cast his fine eyes in a right direction.

Meantime Mrs. Bulliman, discomposed but dignified, summoned her more docile aid-de-camp, Sophia, and went forth. And the first person they met was pretty little Fanny Buxton.

"I am so pleased," said Fanny. "I have had a letter from Mrs. Ernest Dormer—only a few lines, but quite delightful. They are staying at the most lovely place in the Highlands; and she desires to be kindly remembered to all friends."

"When did you hear, Fanny?" was Mrs. Bulliman's cold demand.

"Yesterday morning. I should have called and told Phœbe, but the day was so very wet mamma told me not to go out."

"You did well to obey her," said Mrs. Bulliman. "Phœbe has not heard from Mrs. Dormer, Sophia, or she would have mentioned it?"

"I know that she has not, mamma."

"Ah!" said Fanny Buxton; "but the happy pair are moving about, and you know how difficult it is to write when you are traveling, though it seems so absurd to say so. I have really only a scrap of a note, with a picture of an inn at the top; Phœbe will have a more dignified letter."

"Was that meant for impertinence, Sophia?" said her mother, after they had parted from Fanny.

"No, mamma; I do not think so, at least."

"I do."

"Perhaps it was, too," said the easily convinced Sophia. "And certainly it was impertinence to boast that Mrs. Dormer had paid her the attention of writing to her before any other of the bridemaids."

"Ah, Mrs. Bulliman!" said a cheerful voice.

It was that of pretty Mrs. Fanshaw's husband, a capital fellow, and a prosperous land agent and surveyor. "I am very glad to see you, and you, Miss Bulliman. Naybury is quite full to-day, and I am saving myself ever so many rides by lounging about and looking into the shops like a Bond Street gentleman. I find my people every where. Well, Mrs. Bulliman, have we made our visit to that naughty Mr. Edward Grafton?" he added, with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"Mrs. Fanshaw was not at the Dorcas meeting on Wednesday, or she would have informed you that the subject was being reconsidered," said Mrs. Bulliman.

"No, she was not; but it was my fault," said Fanshaw. "Fact is, that there was a capital concert at Wharnton that night, with some of the stars from London; so I made Bessy run over with me by the rail, and we caught the Brandington express, and were home to supper. We enjoyed it amazingly, and she appreciates good music, and therefore deserves to hear it."

"Your wife fares better than your sisters did," said Sophia, who had a wonderful memory for old quarrels, and who recollected a trifling family discussion at Fanshaw's before he brought his wife home.

"Oh, have you not forgotten that?" laughed Fanshaw. "You must get married, Miss Bulliman, and then you won't carry about memories of things the people concerned have forgotten. And so you reconsider the Saxbury business?—and quite right too. I told Bessy that I knew you had too much sense to think seriously of such a thing, and that I was quite sure Bulliman would put a spoke in the wheel. I'm very glad to hear it indeed. But there's Lord Mazagon—I must catch him, or he'll be off. Good-by! I wish you would come and see us; Bessy has some new pictures to show you. Do."

Fanshaw was off, but this rattle-talk had hit hard. And, moreover, although he was a perfectly good-humored fellow, and though few married couples ever laughed more cheerily together than he and his Bessy, he was quite capable of delivering a little castigation when he thought it was wanted. He adored Bessy, and he knew that in Dorcas she was not adored; so he was naturally prejudiced against that institution, and though he spoke to the Bullimans, as to most people, in a tone that forbade offense, the words were not quite so harmless when you took them by themselves. And Fanshaw winked to himself as he stopped Lord Mazagon's barouche.

"Winking at me, Fanshaw?" said his lordship, pulling up, and laughing.

"No, my lord, I was winking at my wife," said Mr. Fanshaw.

"But I don't see Mrs. Fanshaw," said the courtly old nobleman, looking round, "and she knows that I am the most devoted of her admirers. I would not pass her without taking off my hat for a thousand pounds."

"She is not hereabouts. I will tell you a story."

"Jump up, then, that's capital," chuckled Lord Mazagon, whom the gout kept out of the only place he cared for in the world—the snuggest corner of a favorite club in London, where he heard stories that he might just as well have left off laughing at. The barouche went off at a great pace, his lordship driving excellently in spite of weakened wrists; but we will not follow it, but still attend Mrs. Bulliman, whom Fanshaw had grievously enraged.

"What right had Mr. Fanshaw to use papa's name?" said Sophia, who desired to pull out the vent-peg and let her mother's indignation run.

"If I do not notice that, you need not, I think," said her mother, turning angrily upon her well-meaning offspring.

They went on in the direction of Mr. Chervil's, but another interruption awaited them in the not very pleasing form of Mrs. Cutcheon. This lady lost very little time in greetings in the market-place or any where else, and without even taking the trouble to assume the conventional smile that testifies how gladly you behold your friend, she came close to Mrs. Bulliman, and said, in an undertone of remonstrance:

"So you have been frightened out of the Saxbury business, I hear. I don't say that you are not right, but it makes us all look awkward."

"I am not aware that I was ever frightened out of any business, Mrs. Cutcheon."

"My dear," she said to her awful friend, "you are quite right to take that tone with most people, but not with me. We know one another too well for that. I mean nothing but kindness, and, indeed, I was coming to see you, and ask whether you do not think that for a little time it will be best for the Dorcas meetings to stand over. The work for the poor, you know, can just as well be done at the homes of the ladies, privately, and we can effect quite as much good, without being blamed."

"Who is to blame us, Mrs. Cutcheon, and for what? I don't understand you."

"Well, my dear, you are an older person than myself, much older, and I would not venture to set my experiences against yours, or deny that you are worthy to lead among us as you desire to do, and I must say do very excellently. I consider myself privileged to know you. But I can not quite shut my own eyes. When those who lead, and who very properly expect a certain amount of Christian submission from younger persons, so completely change their views—I am sure for the best reasons—it does not tend to keep up the confidence of humbler folks in the earnestness and sincerity of the others. So that I think, my dear, that instead of bringing our bold declarations into contrast with our second thoughts, and having a rather humiliating meeting, we had better let the matter blow over, and have our delightful union again in the winter."

All this was said with so much show of grave condolence with a person in a supposed state of

mortification, that the carnal nature of Mrs. Bulliman rebelled, and she was sufficiently left to herself to say:

"The next Dorcas meeting will be held at my house on Thursday next, and those who stay away from that meeting had better stay away from all future ones. I have no time for further explanation now, Mrs. Cutcheon, but I shall expect *you*."

"And you shall see me, too," said Mrs. Cutcheon to herself.

At length Mrs. Bulliman came in sight of Mr. Chervil's new architectural shop-front, the costliness of which may have been his reason for putting only sixpence into the plate after Mr. Yotes's missionary lecture, which shamefully insignificant donation had drawn upon him the censure of Dorcas. Mr. Chervil, though only a tradesman, was somebody in Naybury. His large and handsome shop, which was all neatness and brilliancy, was, as has been said, a favorite rendezvous for the better sort of the inhabitants. He was a wise man in his generation. He was highly educated, very skillful in his own calling, and one who knew quite as much about medicine as any of the Naybury practitioners, for whom he entertained a secret but supreme contempt—a sentiment, indeed, which he also held in regard to the majority of his customers, high and low. But he had to live, and he was exquisitely civil. His tall, slim figure, always in close-fitting black, his beautifully white hair, carefully combed from the back to the front of his head, and his high nose and delicate features would, any where but behind a counter, have been very favorably regarded. No greater contrast could be imagined than between him and our friend Mr. Benjamin Dudley, except between their respective establishments. Dudley's slovenly shop, and its miscellaneous and ignoble contents, have been noticed. Mr. Chervil sold every thing which Mr. Dudley sold, and perhaps a few more articles apart from the pharmacopœian roll. But, with the exception of choice perfumes, all such matters were vended in a small side-shop under the care, not of an obnoxious boy like Mr. Cubb Spitty, but of a most gentlemanly assistant, who was only less refined than the master whom he imitated. The large and handsome shop was devoted to the chemist's own proper wares, and there were set chairs of much whiteness of cane and polish of back, and there was a pretty little fountain, which played scented water.

Into this fountain, a few minutes before Mrs. Bulliman's arrival, showy Mrs. De Gully was dipping the corner of a handkerchief much too fine for that period of the day. This incident is mentioned expressly for the purpose of prejudicing the reader against Mrs. De Gully, and showing that she was not a lady. The reader must please not to like Mrs. De Gully. A great many persons liked her; but we ought to like only the good and virtuous, and there is no means of positively proving the fact that she was either. There was no question, at least among men, about her good looks. Rather tall, but lissom and graceful, and somewhat slight, Mrs. De Gully looked admirably upon a horse, which she rode splendidly, especially to hounds, or on the high seat of a barouche, which she drove as well as Lord Mazagon could do. Perhaps she looked to less advantage lounging back in her pony-carriage, with too much effort to look perfectly at her ease. You could then examine her face, which she was quite ready to show you, and you could admire the large soft eyes, the rich complexion, and the saucy mouth, and would not perhaps complain that she had no regular beauty. Possibly you might think that the eyebrows had been artificially improved, but you would be wrong—there were no pigments of any kind on Mrs. De Gully. As for the next questions, who and what she was, the answers were not very ready, or at least they were not very consistent. She was held by those who believed what they were told, in the absence of reasons for doubting it (which is a sensible habit), to be the wife of Captain De Gully, R.N., whom nobody at Naybury had ever seen. It was not, however, supposed that he was sailing in his ship, doing Her Majesty service, but more probably that he was disloyally avoiding the service of certain documents bearing Her Majesty's message. He never came to Martletowers, the somewhat neglected mansion in which his wife resided, some four miles from the town. But this did not prevent her having many visitors, some of them of a good sort, and Mrs. De Gully, though not much visited by the ladies of the district, was in society, and the men called on her with the utmost punctuality, and were seldom in a hurry to come away. She gave few dinners, but had instituted a series of Saturday lunches, which were held in a sort of conservatory, and which were a gracious relief to the set and heavy banquets of the country houses around, and men actually smoked in her presence after these repasts. By way of companion Mrs. De Gully generally had with her a singular little woman, very pale, and always dressed in pearl gray, and her patroness called this person Francine, and stated that she could neither speak nor understand any language but French. That Francine could speak French was certain, upon the other points there were suspicions. Servants had reported that she had been heard to speak very good English to certain visitors—but then servants will say any thing.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SINGLE COMBAT.

Over the handsome face of Mr. Chervil, the alleged skeptic, there came a curious look as he saw Mrs. Bulliman, attended by Sophia, approaching his establishment. By an equally curious coincidence he was just then putting together, for temporary peace, some packets of two powders which are quiet enough while sep-

THE LADIES' BATTLE.

nrate, but which, when they mingle in the glass, effervesce in a furious manner. The learned chemist had few amusements in Naybury. His fellow-tradesmen were worthy, or at least they called one another so in speeches, but were mostly dullards, as those speeches testified, and as Thersites remarks to Patroclus, he profited not by their talk. Being a tradesman, of course he could not visit the houses of those who were not in trade, except at election times, when the most haughty were content to forget the station to which it had pleased Providence to call him, and to avail themselves of his shrewdness, local knowledge, and caustic pen. The Naybury theatre was seldom open, and when it was, although the criticisms sent to London by the stage-manager would make one believe that a more brilliant collection of stars never assembled, Mr. Chervil, who had seen real acting, did not support the Nayburian drama. He was too clever to play any instrument, and too saving to play at cards—let not this last fact be set

down to his disadvantage, as his secret object was to make as much money as he could in order to get away from the place. So, having few relaxations, Mr. Chervil greatly enjoyed a fight between any of his customers. And he thought that he saw symptoms of a fight.

"Mrs. Bulliman comes this way," he said, to give Mrs. De Gully warning to have her hands up.

"Ah!" said Mrs. De Gully, who needed little warning. "You dear creatures, I am so glad to see you," she said, as the Bullimans came in. "I haven't seen you for an age. Smell this perfume of Chervil's," she went on, holding out her overfine handkerchief. "Isn't it heavenly?"

"It is nice," said Mrs. Bulliman, coldly.

"Nice, it's more than nice. Smell it, Miss Phœbe, and tell me that it is angelic."

"This is Sophia," said Mrs. Bulliman, "and I shall be surprised if I hear her apply such words to such a purpose."

"Oh, Sophia, so it is. I beg your pardon, my dear, but you and your sister are so alike that I never know which is the other."

And Mrs. De Gully laughed, not, to do her justice, at her own small wit, but at the blow she had already planted. For Sophia was not ill-looking—Phœbe was very grim.

"Good-morning, Mr. Chervil," said Mrs. Bulliman. "Will you be good enough to put me up a couple of ounces of camphor?"

"What," laughed Mrs. De Gully, "do the moth and rust corrupt in your house? That's very sad. I hoped you knew better things."

"I am glad to find that you know good words, my dear," said Mrs. Bulliman, "and I should not be less glad if I heard you use them more reverently."

Mind, she was quite justified in administering this one. She was much older than Mrs. De Gully, and the latter was impertinent.

"Lord! my dear," said Mrs. De Gully, "I dare say I know as much of the good words, as you call them, as half the parsons that ever got into the humbox. Do you know what a humbox is, Miss Sophia?"

"I never heard the word before, Mrs. De Gully."

"Nor do I wish you to hear it again, Sophia," said her mother.

"Oh, there's no harm in it," laughed Mrs. De Gully, "but you unco' good folks are always ready to suppose the worst. It is only the thieves' slang for the pulpit."

"Since when has it been the fashion for ladies to use thieves' slang?" asked Mrs. Bulliman. "I am out of fashionable society, so you must excuse my ignorance."

"That's very severe, my dear. What's the harm in a bit of fun? Do you see any harm in a humbox, Mr. Chervil?"

"Not so much as I have often seen in a pill-box," said Mr. Chervil, with so respectful a smile that it quite did away with the social impropriety of a tradesman's venturing to exchange a joke with a lady.

"Very good indeed, Mr. Chervil," said Mrs. De Gully, the more graciously that she saw Mrs. Bulliman's sense of the fitness of things hurt by the appeal to the chemist and druggist.

"Have you put up the camphor?" asked Mrs. Bulliman, very freezingly.

"I beg pardon. I did not understand that you were in haste," said the chemist, turning to his camphor-drawer.

"Chervil forgot that he was not serving me, who am never in haste," said Mrs. De Gully. "How any body can be I can not imagine, for the time drags heavily enough, do all we can to waste it. I wish camphor would kill time as well as moths."

"I find the day quite short enough when I have tried to fulfill all its duties," said Mrs. Bulliman.

"Ah, but as I never try to fulfill any of its duties, and indeed I don't know what they are, the case is different. I wish I did know though, because then there would be the excitement of knowing that you were neglecting them."

"You will know the value of precious time some day, my dear, and I only hope that the knowledge may not come when it will be too late."

"That sounds very awful," said Mrs. De Gully, "but I haven't the least idea what it means. I never had any notion of the value of time. Look at my watch," she said; "I brought it out that we might know when to get home, and see, it has stopped."

"Shall I get it wound, m'm?" suggested Mr. Chervil. "My assistant will take it over to the watchmaker in a minute."

"Thanks, no, it would be sure to stop again. I've got no appointment," she daringly said to Mrs. Bulliman, "and a woman's watch never goes right except when the woman is going wrong."

"Sophia," said Mrs. Bulliman, "walk on to Aldrich's, and get the flannels looked out."

Miss Bulliman instantly departed, without the ceremony of even a look at the audacious epigrammatist.

"What," said Mrs. De Gully, radiant with delight, "have you sent her off because you don't like her to hear my rattle?"

"You will pardon my observing that it is the rattle which warns us of the snake," said Mrs. Bulliman; but she added, "I need not say that I had no intention to be rude—the answer escaped me—but I do not allow my children to listen to talk of an objectionable kind."

Mrs. De Gully had flushed up, through her rich complexion, at the very sudden and very hard hit, but Mrs. Bulliman's apology, though it could not be called a soft speech, turned away wrath. Indeed, Mrs. De Gully was so indolent, except when hunting or flirting, that she could never be angry long.

"I dare say that you are right," she said. "Thank Heaven I have no children to interfere with my amusing myself, and nice articles they would be if I had any. But I don't think that

at Sophia's age they would need to be sent away for fear of hearing any thing that any body would be likely to say before them."

"I shall not offend you again," said Mrs. Bulliman, "if I say that I did not think it likely that I should hear you speak lightly on the subject of female profligacy."

"Did I say any thing about female profligacy? I am sure I didn't know it. Oh, you mean about a woman's going wrong. Dear me, what an ugly way to speak of things."

"There is an uglier, and it is in the book which I am glad to hear you are acquainted with, and which in all friendliness I would beg you to study in a fitting spirit."

"So I did, until I began to think for myself, especially about geology and astronomy, and then I left off, because if we are told that the whole of a book is true, and we discover that a good deal of it isn't, we lose faith in the rest, you see."

"I have heard that painful statement often."

"Does that make it the less true?"

"No, but it shows how easily poor human creatures can make their own stumbling-blocks. It is of no use, I know, to tell you that all these objections of philosophy, falsely so called, have been answered, because you do not wish to believe it. However, I do my duty in telling you that it is so, and that the rock of faith remains unshaken, and I have not upon my conscience the responsibility of leaving you in any but a willful error."

This formula—a very sound one—Mrs. Bulliman had used on several occasions, and she therefore gave it with all the advantage an actor derives from rehearsals. It did not, however, produce much effect on Mrs. De Gully.

"Yes, I know. I have been told all that too. Edward Grafton, for one, told it me one day when I refused to believe that the sun and the moon stood still, or that the earth did, to the confusion of almanacs—only they don't mention it—and to the abolition of the law of gravitation—and all that one set of savages might slaughter another. Mr. Edward Grafton had the good manners to tell me that I talked shallow skepticism, and if I took half the pains to understand the story that I took to lose my soul it would be better for me. That was a pretty speech to a lady, wasn't it?"

"I am glad that Mr. Edward Grafton, for once, remembered his duty as a Christian minister."

"But I was as good a Christian as he was, and better, for instead of requesting him to leave the house, I commanded him to stand still, like the sun, and say which day he would dine with me. Was not that heaping coals of fire on his head? No, it was not, because we cook with gas. But was it not Christian-like?—tell me that."

"I have said what it was my duty to say, Mrs. De Gully, and it is so shocking to me to hear your talk that I must bring our conversation to an end. Believe me, you will live to repent all this, and I hope that your repentance will be accepted."

"You find fault with my harmless slang," said Mrs. De Gully, now really angry, "but you open upon me with slang of your own, which is quite as offensive. Why do you preach to me, when you do not act up to your own sermons?"

"I make no pretense to be all that I wish to be, dear friend," said Mrs. Bulliman, sweetening with her victory over the other's temper, "and I am sadly conscious of many shortcomings. But I can not reproach myself with being false to my own professions."

"False is not a lady-like word," said Mrs. De Gully, struggling to be proper behaved, "and therefore I shall not use it even under provocation. But I do say, and I have a right to say, that though you do not mind accusing *me* of being a skeptic, a snake, and a female profligate, and an idiot, and a person who ought to repent—"

"I ventured on no such words against you but the last—"

"You meant it, though, and that is the same. Yet I hear that though you have felt yourself bound in duty to rebuke Mr. Edward Grafton for denouncing your missionaries as humbugs, which I believe they are—"

"Knowing nothing whatever about them—"

"He is honest enough—I have told you what he said to me—and he declared that he wished they were all eaten. Well, he may have been right or he may have been wrong. I believe him right, but you don't, and yet you are afraid to tell him so, because his father is a rich old rector, and haughty. Do you call that consistency?"

By this time Mrs. De Gully had talked herself out of her momentary anger, and smiled as she gave out the last question just as if she had been asking a riddle. The flush went down from under the rich complexion, and the eyes became soft, and all that was left of the storm was a little increase of sauciness about the mouth.

Not so with Mrs. Bulliman, who had held her own fairly, but like a lady, during the earlier fencing, had pronounced her warnings with a certain kindliness, and who had only been moved to elaborate gentleness by a sense of victory. Now, charged home, she hardened at once, and prepared to inflict chastisement. Very stern grew her face of power.

"Your camphor is here, Mrs. Bulliman."

This, of course, was Mr. Chervil, who interposed at the moment to protect Mrs. De Gully. He liked her better than he liked Mrs. Bulliman, though the former was something of a fool and the latter nothing—for chemists are but men, and Mrs. De Gully never, except carelessly, made him feel the distance between them. Mrs. Bulliman, as we know, had her own ideas about her inferiors keeping their station. She turned upon him with no kindly regard.

"When I want it I will take it, Mr. Chervil."

But he was not daunted. He was like the

famous frigate that ran in and intercepted the broadside of the terrible liner which was going to sink the frigate's friend, only the difference was that the frigate was instantly sent to the bottom, and Mr. Chervil floated.

"I have not broken it up," Mr. Chervil continued, by way of further delaying the attack, "because the odor abides longer in the large pieces; but if you would like it triturated it can be done in a minute. If you do not intend to use it directly I would recommend your allowing it to remain in its present state, and one of your servants could break it in the ordinary mortar, or, if you would send it in to me, just before using it, I would do it."

Mr. Chervil's manner was so perfect while he spun out this apparently respectful and tradesmanlike verbiage that Mrs. Bulliman could neither interrupt him nor resent his speech. And he certainly managed to spike some of her guns. She understood, not exactly that he was protecting Mrs. De Gully, but that he was being impertinent in revenge for her snub. Mrs. De Gully's apprehension was much too indolent for her to recognize the chivalry of her chemical ally. It came to Mrs. Bulliman's turn at last, and she said:

"Our intimacy, Mrs. De Gully, is not so great as to justify the liberty which you take in making personal remarks."

"My dear soul," said Mrs. De Gully, "isn't that good, when you have been scolding me for half an hour?"

"My remonstrances, which you are pleased to call scolding, have been made on grounds of a higher kind than you probably understand, and I must beg you to recollect that they began only after a speech of such levity as no Christian person could hear in silence. Your excessive rudeness admits of no extenuation."

"My dear, nobody cares what I say, and very likely I don't mean half of it. There, that's as much of an apology as I can bring my carnal nature—isn't that what you call it?—to make. But you might be pretty sure that I like your husband too well to intend to annoy you."

This remark was not precisely calculated to please Mrs. Bulliman, for sundry reasons. First, she was too independent in mind to wish to be either liked or disliked for the sake of Mr. Bulliman; secondly, she had a sort of grievance in regard to that gentleman and the lady before her. Mr. Bulliman had upon two occasions shown more zeal than his wife thought either necessary or professional in assisting Mrs. De Gully out of some difficulties. The gallant naval captain, on perpetual leave of absence, had behaved to his spouse with what has been called unremitting kindness—that is, he had omitted remittances, and Martletowers had been obliged (in consequence, as Mrs. De Gully said—but that might or might not be) to extend its temporary hospitalities to the representatives of law. Mr. Bulliman, who, though a perfectly decorous, if worldly-minded solicitor, had more than once happened to be riding his sedate cob in the neighborhood of Martletowers at lunch-time, and had somehow established a sort of friendship with the handsome occupant. It did not amount to a flirtation—respectable solicitors of five-and-fifty never flirt—but he was amused and tolerant, and gave the lady some wise advice, on the strength of which intimacy Mrs. De Gully consulted Mr. Bulliman in her troubles, and was very confidential with him. But he denied that she was his client; he had retired; he had no clients; but he was very ready to go and see her whenever summoned by one of her overscented notes, the odor of which was quite hateful to Mrs. Bulliman. The latter believed in her heart that her husband had lent money to the lady; but though humble and submissive to excess in household matters, Mr. Bulliman was as silent as one of the Discreet Statues on professional affairs. Therefore, it will be seen, the declaration of forbearance out of regard for Mrs. Bulliman's husband was not acceptable to Mr. Bulliman's wife. Such was one of the little episodes in life which give us all a great deal more concern than serious questions, and show us how utterly unphilosophical we all are.

"I am not aware of any good reason for bringing Mr. Bulliman's name into question, Mrs. De Gully. I am sure, however, that he must be very grateful for your good opinion, and —for your business."

She ought not to have said that, but we are sometimes left to ourselves.

"Dear old thing he is!" said Mrs. De Gully, gushingly. "I assure you I am quite in love with him, and you see how far gone I am when I confess it to you. I haven't seen him for at least a week though, a faithless swain; will you please to tell him that my heart is breaking about it?"

Mrs. De Gully had not seen him for a week. No, thought Mrs. Bulliman, but that means that she has seen him long since the last time he mentioned a visit. But what was to be said to an antagonist who met her with such careless effrontery? Mr. Bulliman should expiate the impertinence of the woman he chose to befriend.

"Before I go," said Mrs. Bulliman, taking up her camphor, "I will just say, in reference to your remarks about Mr. Grafton—"

"My dear creature, are we going back to that? It had all gone out of my head. I forget what I did say. Pray don't call it remarks, that sounds like Mrs. Opie's novels. Her people make remarks to one another, and highly improving they are, if one could only read them."

"I disapprove of all fiction," said the other lady, "but I had occasion to examine that lady's works, and, except for the form, I found them unobjectionable. But I wish you would allow me to explain myself. I have reason to believe that you are not the only person who has thought proper to express opinions as to an intention, which was privately expressed, of paying a visit to the Rectory at Saxbury. I wish that all who take the liberty to talk on the subject may distinctly understand that whatever I do I shall do

in my own way and at my own time, and that I venture to advise all such persons to mind their own business."

This was a sad anti-climax, and lamentably colloquial. Mrs. Bulliman had intended to close with a much more imposing peroration, to the effect that such persons should be perfectly clear that they had fulfilled all their own duties before they presumed to dictate to others. But that irreverent Mrs. De Gully had found a little glass syringe, and was just then amusing herself by squirting the perfumed water at a venerable cat.

"Eh," she said, as Mrs. Bulliman ended. "Oh yes, thanks. Right in your ear, my pussy. We are to mind our own business. I will remember and tell every body your orders. Be sure you give my love to Adolphus," she added, seeing Mrs. Bulliman about to leave.

Adolphus! Mr. Bulliman's names were certainly Charles Adolphus Bulliman (the more brilliant wits in Naybury found out that his initials spelled cab, and for two years he was incessantly hailed, as if by a fare, with that sparkling epigram), but the Adolphus was a dropped name, and that Mrs. De Gully should use it argued that there must have been wild levity of talk at Martletowers. The lady took no notice of the outrage, however, and departed, taking also no notice of Mr. Chervil, whose shop had been so long occupied, unceremoniously, as a battle-field. But he was not surprised. It is only in demoralized foreign capitals that a customer is civil to a tradesman.

On the whole, Mrs. Bulliman may be said to have been routed with slaughter. The light craft had baffled the ship of the line. She had certainly said some rude things, but they had made no impression, and she was finally dismissed with an impertinent message to her husband. And the enemy was left in possession of the field of battle. Dorcas was defeated in the person of its president.

"Mrs. Bulliman is a very conscientious lady," said Mr. Chervil, gravely, almost meekly.

"Is she?" said Mrs. De Gully, quietly. "I will look the word out in the dictionary. I suppose I shall find it not far from cheeky. *Allons, Francine.*"

With which graceful remark Mrs. De Gully also swept from the shop, followed by the pale and silent Francine, who had been perfectly still during the entire debate, and who, as she did not understand a word of English, might not be supposed to have been much edified by the affair. They got into the pony carriage, which was in waiting, and Mr. Chervil, though affecting to follow them to the door, took care to be so leisurely in his movements as not to reach the step until they were seated. The lady dashed off, and the servant had to run for it to gain his place, and thus gave Mrs. De Gully time to say, exultingly:

"I hope she liked it."

"Yes, you served her out rather," said Mademoiselle Francine. "I thought you were going to squirt at her."

"Did think of it, but—"

But the man was in his place, and no more English was spoken for that reason. And no more French was spoken by Mrs. De Gully, for another reason, and a very good one.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Chervil," said pretty Mrs. Fanshaw, entering the shop. "You have not seen Mr. Fanshaw about lately, have you? He was to meet me here."

"Somebody told me, I think, that he was seen driving out of town with Lord Mazagon," said Mr. Chervil.

"Well," laughed the pretty wife, "if that is not good! After making a special appointment with me. However, if he is amusing himself I am content. If he should look in you will bear witness that I was punctual. I have news which I think you will like to hear, Mr. Chervil."

"I am sure I shall."

"I have a letter from Mrs. Conway. They have joined the newly-married couple, and all are well and happy."

"And that *is* good news. The next will be that they are coming home."

CHAPTER XXVI.

HERO AND LEANDER.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Reverend Theodore Grafton, Rector of Saxbury, turning from the window to the party at lunch.

Wrong, of course, if the reverend gentleman regarded Jove as a nonentity, and a hundred times worse if he regarded him as did the author of the Universal Prayer.

"Dear Theodore," said Mrs. Grafton, astonished.

"An old college habit—not to be defended," said the Rector, reddening. "But it may almost be excused in the circumstances. There's Miss Bulliman coming."

"Oh, Edward!" said his mother, laughing. "This is too bad of you."

"Phœbe Bulliman coming," said the curate. "I must escape."

"Why," said Mr. Abbott, who was still on his visit—he had, however, been home three or four times during his sojourn at the Rectory—"that is the name of the lady who, you told me, was charged with the visitation to call you, Edward, to account."

"Her mother, her mother," said the young clergyman, impatiently.

"Stay, if you please, Edward," said his father.

"You wish me to stay?"

"Certainly."

"She can not be come on that errand," said Mrs. Grafton. "I had some talk to her at the wedding. They would not send *her*. Perhaps she is not coming here at all."

"She was at the gate, I tell you," said the Rector.

And she was now at the door, for they heard the bell. It was rung somewhat timidly.

"I dare say she has only come about some society, or charity, or something of that sort," said gentle Mrs. Grafton. "Don't be harsh with her until we see."

"I am unaware that it is my habit to be harsh with any lady," said the Rector; but his hard look at his wife did not exactly confirm his speech.

"If you like to face her by deputy say so quickly," said Mr. Abbott.

"Let her come in here, by all means," said the Rector.

And Miss Bulliman was announced.

That young lady had been left, as we recollect, by her mother, with advice to think over the rebellious manifestation on which Phœbe had ventured. She did think over it, and on the scolding she had received, and the unkind emphasis laid upon the number of her days, and the considerations which had provoked her to resist the will of her parent. We regret to say that the result of her meditation was not such as Mrs. Bulliman would have approved. Phœbe had discovered that rebellion was not such a difficult thing, and she had argued with herself, first, to the effect that its consequences were not very awful; and, secondly, that having done a little in that line, she might as well do a little more. Perhaps the Smooth Stones from Ancient Brooks, with which Mr. Spurgeon had supplied her, furnished her with the idea that she might sling a few on her own account, and perhaps with the success which attended the victory of Goliah. Her mother's parting words, though really meant in kindness, that she ought to disabuse herself of any idea that Edward Grafton cared about her, had sunk as deeply into her heart as David's smooth stone sank into the forehead of the giant. And having grimly made up her mind that at seven-and-twenty a young lady, whose friends have done nothing for her in the way of her settlement in life, was somewhat justified in looking out for herself, Phœbe had formed a resolution, which she had come over to Saxbury to carry out. Little thought Mrs. Bulliman, when retreating from the field of Chervil, that she should find no daughter at home, and still less dreamed the champion of Dorcas of the errand on which her impenitent child had gone.

After Mrs. Grafton's hint Miss Bulliman was received with more cordiality than she expected. For she well knew that the Rectory was aware of the displeasure of Dorcas, of which institution she was held to be a bulwark. Phœbe was courteously entreated, and invited, of course, to lunch, which, however, she declined.

"Have you heard from the bride?" asked Mrs. Grafton, whose kind nature always sought to revive the pleasantest recollections of former meetings with others.

"No, Mrs. Grafton. But Fanny Buxton called for a moment this morning, to say that she had had a note."

"All well and happy, I hope?"

"Very well, and very happy."

"What a pleasant wedding it was!"

"I have not been at many, but every body seemed to enjoy this one."

"And you deserved to do so, Miss Bulliman, for it was so very kind of you to accept office at the last minute."

Phœbe smiled as well as she knew how, and meant, poor girl, to make her face wear an agreeable expression, but the art of smiling can not be acquired in a moment, any more than that of fiddling. The effort was laudable, but not very successful. And moreover she was conscious that she did not deserve the credit of entire disinterestedness. She had felt a secret joy in assisting at a ceremonial which forever ended all relations between Magdalen and Edward.

The Rector thought that his wife's civilities had gone far enough, and he gave her a glance, well understood, which intimated his will that she should hold her tongue, and let Phœbe open her mission. But Phœbe had not expected quite so large an audience. In fact, in spite of her grimness, and her habit of taking the stern view of matters, worldly and spiritual, she had a good deal more of the soft heart than most persons supposed. She was daunted. Here was not only the majestic Rector, but Edward Grafton, and also the merry-eyed lawyer, and her only ally was Mrs. Grafton, who might not care to do much in her aid. She would have liked of all things, at the moment, that Mrs. Grafton should manage a private chat with her. But the council sat, and Phœbe was compelled to speak.

"I came over—" she began, with something like a blush, which did not escape Mr. Abbott.

"Ten thousand pardons for interrupting you," said Mr. Abbott, "but you have business to speak of, Miss Bulliman, and I think I had better do what my friend Mrs. Grafton is kind enough to tolerate in me—I will just go into her green-house, and fumigate her beautiful plants."

He rose, and in going out he passed close to Edward, and managed to bestow upon the curate a great wink, unperceived by the others, which promised that in due season the younger Grafton should hear a good deal about the visit of the admiring young lady.

"Is it a visit on business?" asked Mrs. Grafton, smiling.

"I can hardly say that. Indeed, now that I have to explain it, I seem to be at a loss how to apologize for coming at all."

"We will waive all apologies," said the Rector, graciously, "in consideration of the pleasure of a visit from Miss Bulliman."

"I could better, perhaps, explain in a few words with Mrs. Grafton—" stammered Phœbe.

"If you are good enough to allow us choice, Miss Bulliman," said the Rector, "we should both much prefer hearing you. But Edward will, I am sure, withdraw, if you please."

But that was exactly what did not please Phœbe, and with a laugh, rather too nervous to be pretty, she requested that Mr. Edward would stay.

"The business concerns me, perhaps," said Edward, with good nature.

"Please do not call it business."

"Then we will call it pleasure, as I have said," said the elder Mr. Grafton; "and now will you kindly inform us of its character?"

"I am acting entirely on my own responsibility," said Phœbe, "and I am far from sure that I am acting rightly. But I am certain that you will not misunderstand me, and that if—"

Phœbe did not like it. She would have given any thing to be back with Ancient Brooks. She nearly broke down.

"We will understand nothing," said the Rector, "but that Miss Bulliman means every thing that is lady-like and kindly."

This he said like a gentleman, and without the old and somewhat pompous manner, and it reassured Phœbe.

"I am sure you are very good," she said, "and I am very much obliged to you. Mr. Edward," she added, making a sudden plunge, "do you remember saying something to us—to mamma rather—in the street one day, about missionaries?"

"Stay, my dear Edward," said his father. "A clergyman can not be too circumspect. We are told to avoid all appearance of evil. I trust that you have not allowed the unruly member, as it is well termed by the apostle, to triumph over your discretion. But, be this as it may, I should caution you, and Miss Bulliman will forgive a father's caution, that it is a duty to yourself to abstain from any admission which might be prejudicial to you if used hereafter."

This speech, which could not be called objectionable if the texts had been omitted, stung Phœbe to the quick, and she actually burst into tears.

"And do you think," she asked, as she wiped them away without pretense of hiding them, "does Mrs. Grafton think that I am capable of so mean an action as to come into your house and try to get evidence against your son?"

"I do not believe it, Miss Bulliman," said Mrs. Grafton. "Not for a moment."

"If I thought that you could," said Phœbe, recovering herself, "I should only have to apologize for my intrusion, and to go away. But say you don't think of such a thing, Mr. Edward."

"It never crossed my mind, Miss Bulliman. But I think you will easily forgive my father's care lest any nonsense of mine should do me injury."

"It will never do you any through me," said Phœbe; "and if I had said before what I intended to say the thought would not have arisen. For I was going to make the request that nothing I might say should be repeated to any living soul. I suppose that I may still ask that?"

The Rector was silent.

"I hope that you may trust to our good feeling," said Mrs. Grafton, "and I think that you do, or we should not have had the pleasure of seeing you to-day."

"Very well put, my dear," said the Rector. And his wife actually colored with satisfaction that he was pleased to approve her words.

"And I do," said Phœbe, earnestly; "and I will say out at once what I mean, and I am sure that you will construe it kindly. I will not ask you that question again, Mr. Edward," she went on, with a smile which was graver than her first, and therefore agreed with her better, "but I will just put a possible case: Suppose that a clergyman had used words which gave offense to persons of different views; and suppose that some of these persons had thought that he and his friends ought to be remonstrated with?"

"Nothing could be more respectfully or more properly expressed, Miss Bulliman," said the Rector; "pray conclude a sentence which promises so well."

"Then suppose that one person—I shall never say it in that way," said Phœbe, "and I must give it in my own. Mrs. Grafton, many of the Dorcas ladies think that mamma ought to come here and lecture you all. I do not think so; and because I do not choose to be mixed up in what I consider wrong, I have come over to say so, and there's the truth. If you think that I am taking too bold a step, I am very sorry; but I thought over it a good deal." And here Phœbe, crossing to Mrs. Grafton, sat down beside her, took her hand, and began to cry again.

If this had been the action of a pretty girl a writer would have been charmed to narrate the incident; but Phœbe was neither very young, nor at all pretty, and her tears did not make her look better; so the affair is told curtly and without triumph. All that can be said is, that it was done in a natural and feminine manner.

On the whole, the Rector was a little disappointed. He had hoped that Phœbe was the deputation, and that she was going to administer the rebuke, in answer to which he had intended to speak, of course in a gentlemanly way, but to castigate the presumption—first, of an ugly girl who dared to come and reprove a clergyman; and, secondly, of the semi-dissenting persons who had sent her; and he had conceived a few sentences which should make the ears of Dorcas to tingle. Instead of the attack, it was not even a flag of truce; it was a deserter who had come in. Then he looked at Phœbe, and admitted that she had behaved very well to the Rectory, and he wished that she had not been so ugly, though as a clergyman he had no right to entertain such a wish. Next, he behaved with perfect propriety, thanked Miss Bulliman for the interest which she had taken in the affair, and assured her that whether her friends carried out their design or not—and he hoped that on reflection they would abandon it—no one in that house would ever connect her with an act of which she had signified most becoming disapproval. As Phœbe listened she thought that the High Church rounded its sentences better than the Evangelicals. Of course she was gratified, but she was far more grateful for the kindly pressure of her hands by Mrs. Grafton.

As for the Reverend Edward Grafton, in honor of whom all this scene was really got up, he showed himself equal to the situation by looking steadily out at the window. For, without being in the slightest degree coxcombical, he was told by his instinct, and the tale was confirmed by sundry memories, that Miss Phœbe's tender feelings toward himself had every thing to do with her revolt against her mother and Dorcas. And Edward was of much too earnest a nature to care about the ludicrous; in fact, like most earnest people, he was without much sense of humor. He was perplexed at the thought that Miss Bulliman had taken this bold step for love of him. It was Hero swimming over to Leander, and Leander, instead of welcoming her with ardor, wiping the spray from her fair shoulders, and bringing forth the restoring wine, was more inclined to imitate St. Kevin, and push her back again into the sea. He heartily wished that she had kept with her kith and kin, and had come over, if she pleased, to excommunicate him, instead of making this sacrifice for his sake. Very much annoyed was the curate as he stood at the window, and his annoyance was not materially soothed by the expressive pantomime of Mr. Abbott, who, smoking his cigar, spied out Edward, and instantly went through a series of attitudes descriptive of a lover's sudden reception of his idol and the appropriate raptures.

When Phœbe rose to take leave the Rector said:

"Edward, do yourself the honor of seeing Miss Bulliman across the fields; it is a holiday, and there is a good deal of scum about."

The younger Grafton was conscious of feeling most unfilially toward the author of his existence, but what was to be said but the proper thing?

Phœbe was secretly delighted, but made the usual protestations.

The oddest conduct was that of Mrs. Grafton, who rather opposed this exercise of politeness by Edward, and went the length of saying that the people behaved very decently, and she did not think Miss Bulliman had any thing to apprehend. The Rector looked rather puzzled than angry at this resistance to his will, and Phœbe thought that it was unkind. Edward, perhaps, guessed what was in the mind of his gentle-hearted mother. Mrs. Grafton had been so pleased with the conduct of Miss Bulliman that the motherly soul awoke, and she was reluctant to allow the ugly girl to be encouraged in any degree to indulge hopes that must be blasted. For Mrs. Grafton saw at a glance how the land lay, and knew, even better than Edward, that the demonstration had been made for him.

But the Rector and politeness prevailed, and Edward and Phœbe departed together, Mr. Abbott not forgetting to be at the gate, and to salute them in his most respectful manner.

"Why was he not to go with her?" asked the Rector.

"Poor thing! Don't you see what it all means? We laugh, but it is earnest with her."

"Now, do you know, that never occurred to me?" said the Rector, who seemed hurt that there should be any thing in heaven or earth that he had not been aware of. "But she could hardly dare to think of Edward."

"My dear Theodore, women are dreadfully daring in such matters, however cowardly in others. Am not I a proof of it?"

That was just the sort of thing the Rector liked, and he was more than affable, and nearly affectionate to his wife for the rest of the day.

"Well," said Mr. Abbott, coming in as the very gracious smile with which the wife's speech had been rewarded faded from the Rector's face, "am I to prepare the settlements?"

"We have been playing with edge-tools, my dear Abbott; at least so says Mrs. Grafton, by whose opinion I am always ready to be guided on delicate questions. We have been shooting our arrows into the dark, and behold the stricken deer has been to us for succor."

"Do you mean that the young lady has been here to demand the hand of Edward? Ha, ha! he did not look very happy."

"The agitation attendant on an unexpected victory," said the Rector. And so they jested with poor Phœbe's heart-pangs.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE NET.

The walk across the fields had to be performed, and Edward Grafton made up his mind to acquit him of his duties as escort with the best grace he could. Utterly unacceptable as was his companion, he could not help feeling that Phœbe had intended to show very good feeling, and that it would be ungracious in him, for whose sake it had been manifested, to be less courteous than his father and mother. So he lost no time in expressing his own acknowledgments, and though they were by no means so elegantly worded as his father's had been, we need not say that they were much more welcome to Phœbe.

"I am very glad to be so spoken to," she said, "for I need some support when I remember that I am setting myself in opposition to mamma and asserting a will of my own."

Edward Grafton, who was any thing but a man of compliment, was very nearly going to say that Miss Bulliman was quite old enough to think for herself. But his clerical instincts saved him when his politeness was at fault, and he replied with the usual commonplace about our duty of obedience as a general rule, and the necessity of sometimes remembering that we owed a higher duty than to our parents.

But this was by no means what Phœbe wanted, and she had to endeavor to work him round to another point of view.

"I do not like accusing other persons of pre-

sumption," she said; "but my own ideas are entirely apart from those which—which have made me come here to-day."

Edward Grafton was now seized with a brilliant notion.

"I am glad to believe, Miss Bulliman, that you have seen the futility of the kind of church-principles with which I hear that some of your friends are inoculated. Without meaning offense, I may say that they can hardly be called church-principles at all, and are indeed little better than dissent. It is gratifying that your eyes should be opened to their errors, and I may take your kindly coming over to-day in proof that you recognize the real position of the clergymen, which the low church by no means sees."

Poor Phœbe! However, she did her best.

"You mean, of course, Mr. Edward, that I disapprove of his being taken to task by strangers."

"By the laity at all, you mean. You see, do you not, that he is set over them as their spiritual superior, and that it is for him to teach and for them to learn."

Yes, thought Phœbe; but when he teaches that missionaries ought to be eaten, what is to be done then?

"I can imagine nothing more sad," pursued the curate, "than the condition of a clergyman whose parishioners think themselves entitled to call him to account for his words and works. It is too painful to think of, such a submission to an unauthorized censorship. Yet in Scotland, I believe, the ministers actually encourage their hearers, even of the lower orders, to give opinions on the sermons which they have heard; and I observe that when a question of law arises as to the fitness of a clergyman for his work, not only the butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers of the place are called to certify as to what they are pleased to think of his doctrine and manners, but old women are asked whether he comforted them, and what sort of texts he shouted into their ear-trumpets. It is too melancholy a picture."

Phœbe was quite capable of saying something in answer to this, but she did not want to discuss Church matters. She had an opportunity now of showing something of the state of her heart, and she did not know when she might have another chance. It was provoking, therefore, that this stupid priest would keep on about religious topics. But the fact was that he was terribly afraid of getting upon any less safe ground. They walked on, Edward taking a pace quite as fast as was compatible with good manners, and much faster than Miss Bulliman thought necessary, and inspiration did not come to her aid; some people think calmly and vigorously when walking briskly, others do not. Presently they neared Trafalgar, and the sight of Mrs. Faunt's cottage revived a series of thoughts in Edward's mind, and did not make him more impressionable. But the case pressed.

"I asked Mr. and Mrs. Grafton," said Phœbe, in a lower voice than she had previously used, "that nothing might be said as to my having disclaimed any share in the intended remonstrance. It now seems to me that I had no right to ask such a thing, and I hope, Mr. Edward, that you do not think I am ashamed of what I have said."

"Certainly I do not," replied Edward, "but I am sure that nothing will be repeated. The Rector and my mother are people of the world, and quite understand the art of holding their tongues without allowing themselves to be accused of insincerity, and you may rely upon me."

"I am certain that I may," said Phœbe, giving him a tender kind of look; but it was unfortunately lost, from his habit of looking any where but in the face of the person he might be speaking with. And she saw it was lost, and as they were drawing very near to Naybury, and the interview must soon be over, she said: "And I hope that you, especially, will not suspect me of boldness and self-will. I am only too happy to submit like a child to the guidance of others" (she had a good mind to say another), "and I think that this is the first time in my life that I was ever rebellious." Ending with a deprecatory smile.

"We will not say rebellious," replied Edward, gravely, "but conscientious; that is, I don't mean it was the first time you were ever conscientious—you know what I mean. And, perhaps, as you are now beyond all conscientiousness—I beg your pardon, I am talking nonsense!—but we are near Naybury, and I—perhaps I had better say good-afternoon. Good-afternoon, Miss Bulliman, I am sure."

Phœbe stared, as well she might; but she did not know the disturbing cause which was making the curate talk incoherent trash. He had suddenly discovered Mrs. Faunt at the door of her cottage, and she had made a signal to him that he was to come to her.

Miss Bulliman could only respond to the hurried greeting by extending her hand, and putting into her pressure as much warmth as was consistent with maidenly modesty. And then she went on her way, not feeling that she had done a great deal toward touching the heart of Edward Grafton, and yet on the whole as much pleased with herself as a truly pious person ought to be. She had in great measure released herself, as she thought, from an overstringent rule at home; she had selected a line of action for herself, and had been rewarded for it by the applause of two clergymen of the Church of England; one a very superior person indeed and an aristocrat, and by the approval of one of the most lady-like women of the neighborhood; and then she hoped that Edward Grafton, when he came to consider the subject and to listen to her praises—which she fondly hoped he would hear from his parents—would begin to think well of her. A basis was at all events laid on which a structure of happiness was reared by Phœbe's softened imagination, and having duly admired it, she had the resolution

to take it quietly down, and to become as grim and determined as before, as she approached the house in which she expected stern questioning.

But few things come exactly as we expect them to do, for which reason it is not a bad bit of superstition which induces some people always to make up their minds for the worst. Mrs. Bulliman was in no mood for conflict; and though of course she demanded where her daughter had been, the reply that Phœbe had taken a long walk was accepted as sufficient. We therefore leave the adventurous maiden to her own contemplations, and go back to the companion of part of that long walk.

Edward Grafton had seen and heard nothing of Mrs. Faunt since the night when he gave her the money to start her on her way to London. Very soon after that time a revulsion of feeling, and a recurrence to his sense of the character of a gentleman, and perhaps an influence of a still higher kind, had made him thoroughly ashamed of having yielded to her wishes, and he heartily hoped never to see her again. We do not say that his love for Magdalen had departed, as, of course, it ought to have done, when she became the bride of another, nor is it at present necessary to examine the state of his heart. He felt, almost as soon as he had emerged from the cottage in which Mrs. Faunt had tempted him to the most despicable act of his life, that he had disgraced himself in his own eyes, and had risked his position in society. He felt too—for he was capable of generous sentiment—that haughtily as he had been treated by Magdalen when he sought to warn her against her marriage, and utterly as she had trampled out his own hopes, he had provoked it all, and that she was unoffending except in defense of the man whom she had chosen. The more he reflected on the mean and coarse method which he had been induced to adopt in order to obtain information that might hinder Ernest Dormer's fortunes in love the more detestable did the temptress appear; and there were moments when even this highly educated gentleman—this priest of the church, was almost inclined to believe that some judicial spell had been upon him when he listened to the persuasions of that evil old woman. But shaking off folly, and owning that the influence to which he had submitted was simply the agency of angry passion, he resolved to extricate himself from the dirty meshes of the net that had been cast over him, and to put himself well with those whom he had thought to injure. We have seen that he put this resolve somewhat boldly into practice, and solicited permission to assist at the marriage of Magdalen and Dormer. And on that day he kept strict watch over himself; and though Ernest Dormer had not thought favorably of his bearing in society, those who knew Edward Grafton well were not slow to notice his abandonment of the alternate extremes of absence of mind and of emphatic earnestness which were usually observed in the young curate. He showed the most respectful attention to Magdalen, was courteous to Dormer, and he forced himself to converse, with some show of interest, with any of the guests who came near him on that day. Since that time he had endeavored to impress upon every one that the Dormers and Conways were his valued friends, and that he intended to cultivate their friendship as much as possible. It was thought in Naybury that a man of Edward's peculiar temperament had done more than could have been expected of him; but this was thought by those who did not know more than that he was a rejected suitor of Miss Conway.

So long a time had passed since Mrs. Faunt's departure that Edward had begun to believe that he should not meet her again. He hit on the belief that she was only an artful impostor who had played upon him for the sake of obtaining money, and having got this would not face him any more; and this view of the case was so pleasant to him that, with the usual wisdom of man, he speedily made it a belief. Gradually, therefore, he was relieved from the sense of his wrong-doing, and as he knew that the secret was known only to himself and to the woman who had gone, he had nearly blotted the business out of his memory. A casual word from Mr. Abbott had revived it for a night, but since that time Edward Grafton had been tranquil.

But Mrs. Faunt had come back. And worse, she had demanded another visit from him.

He was, we may be sure, foolish enough, at the first outbreak of his angry dismay, to think bitterly of his father for having sent him on the walk with Phœbe, and even more bitterly of the poor girl herself for having been the cause of his coming in Mrs. Faunt's way. But this miserable irritation passed off with the recollection that if the woman meant to see him it was of little consequence whether they encountered to-day or to-morrow. The question was, would he see her at all?

Long pondering over the situation, before her return to Saxbury, had enabled Edward Grafton to shape out a course for himself in the event of that return taking place. But we do not need to say that a person who throws up a fortification against an antagonist whom he does not expect to attack it will generally do his work feebly, and his devices will not be well matured. So it was in Edward Grafton's case. His idea was that he would refuse to see Mrs. Faunt, and then, if she persevered in approaching him, he would treat her with becoming contempt. He would know nothing of her except that she was a pauper who never went to church, and whom he had sometimes visited in the hope of urging her to better conduct. If she dared to breathe a word of the unholy compact between the witch and himself he would utterly deny it, and as he was a gentleman and a clergyman, and she was a poor, bad sort of woman, he might reasonably expect, by meeting her charge with indignation or scorn, to crush his disreputable enemy. Such was his idea, and it was not altogether a bad one, if we make due concession to human na-

ture. We know, no doubt, that a true Christian, to say nothing of a Christian clergyman, would not add to his offense the grievous sin of lying and bearing false witness against his neighbor, and that it was Edward Grafton's duty, not perhaps to anticipate his punishment, for it might mercifully be spared him, but to be prepared for it, and when it came he was to say, "I have sinned," and take the consequences. But though Edward Grafton was no hypocrite in his religion, he did not see his way to a crown of martyrdom. He easily convinced himself that for the error of half an hour he was not called upon to make his whole life shameful, or to inflict deadly wounds on the hearts of his proud father and his affectionate mother. In fact, he never entertained seriously the thought of pleading guilty; and let those who read his story be very thankful if they can conscientiously say that they would have so pleaded.

Some may think of a compromise, and say that he might have gone away from Saxbury —have traveled—have let the affair die out. But even if this course would have saved him, instead of leaving his enemy to spread a scandal for which his flight would have given strength, it was impossible for him to go. For very good reasons he must remain at the Rectory.

Now he had to carry out his designed defense. There was the woman, awaiting him. He could have avoided her on that day, but he was morally certain that the next would bring her to his father's house.

Edward Grafton then knew that he had not the persistent courage necessary to carry out his plan. He pictured the scene which must begin the strife, the haughty horror of his father, the agitation of his mother. Then the talk of the parishioners; and then—worst of all—the news being conveyed to Magdalen Dormer.

He lingered long in the pathway after Miss Phœbe had departed, and any one of a romantic turn of mind, who had seen him part, on friendly terms, with a smiling lady, would have fancied that he was a happy and accepted lover, reluctant to leave the spot where his vows had been heard. We often make these mistakes when we make romances.

Suddenly a good thought came to him. He would avoid the woman now, but only that he might go home and make a confidence. He would trust Mr. Abbott, who had known him from childhood, and who was deep in all the family secrets. That long-headed and experienced man would do something; he had told them but lately that he was very successful in crippling and chastising slanderers.

He should have thought of this before, for though he lost no time along the circuitous path which he was obliged to take to avoid Mrs. Faunt's cottage, he was too late. Mr. Abbott had received a telegram calling him home, and he had instantly gone off to catch a train which must have started a quarter of an hour when Edward reached the Rectory.

Then he determined on a third course, and we shall see how it prospered.

The Reverend Edward Grafton, walking with the brisk and dignified step which some clergymen learn, while others are always either bustling or dawdling, came late in the afternoon to the cottage of the widow Faunt. He had mentioned at home that he should make a few calls on poor people.

The old spider was in her parlor, but she did not come out, and the fly had to walk in without invitation.

Mrs. Faunt was better dressed than on the day we first saw her. She was not at all in splendor, as she had appeared in London upon some occasions of which we have heard, and others of which we may hear, but her dress was perfectly tidy, and not at all awry. Something had been done to her hair also—it had been parted by some hand of more mathematical accuracy than her own, and she might have been taken for a very respectable professed cook. She was not seated on her table, but very decorously on the one good chair of the hut. And when the clergyman came in she not only abstained from offering to give him that seat, but she did not even rise to receive him.

"Well, Mrs Faunt," said Edward Grafton, who had arranged some speeches in his own mind. "You wished to see me, as I gathered from your gestures."

"And you did not wish to see me, Sir?" asked Mrs. Faunt, calmly.

"Had you any thing particular to say? If not I had better look in another day, as my time is rather fully occupied at present."

"Oh, that's the tone, is it?" said Mrs. Faunt, as if talking to herself and having discovered the answer to a riddle. "I might have expected it. Well, Sir, I do not know that I have any thing particular to say, but if you asked me any questions I might recollect something that might be interesting."

"I have no questions to ask you," said Edward.

He thought that this was rather cleverly put, and would be a hint to Mrs. Faunt to let by-gones be by-gones, and start afresh.

But this hint she was not inclined to take.

"I thought you might want to inquire how I had laid out your money for you, Sir. Gentlemen are usually desirous to see the bill, however liberal they may act in paying it."

"If I repeat to you," said Edward Grafton, "that I have no inquiries whatever to make, I think you will understand me, and there is an end of the matter."

"What matter, Sir?" said the spider.

"As to any relief I may have given you," said Mr. Grafton, meaning to be still more clever.

"You never gave me any relief, Mr. Edward Grafton. I never needed any, and if I had needed any, I should have gone to the people of my own parish, which is not yours."

"Just so," said Edward, nervously eager to

end the talk and get away. "Any way you like, so you understand. I have nothing more to say."

"Stop a bit, Sir," said Mrs. Faunt, rather coolly than insolently. "I don't like to be talked to in that manner. I mentioned the last time but one that I had the honor of speaking to you—the last time of all was in church, where I have better manners than to speak—I said that I did not like parson-talk. Don't, if you please, come here saying that you gave me relief, when you never did any thing of the kind. I deny it altogether, and I don't think that you, as a gentleman, will say it again."

"You understand me, Mrs. Faunt, and this talk is needless."

"But it is not needless, Sir," said the woman, raising her voice a little, "and I will not be told to understand what I don't understand. You have no right to make me out a pauper to serve a purpose of your own."

"I have no purpose," said Edward, "and I see no reason for your excitement, Mrs. Faunt. It was not relief, then, it was a gift, so say no more about it. I hope it has prospered with you."

"It was no gift, Sir, neither. What call have you to make me gifts of ten sovereigns, or me to take them? It *was* ten sovereigns; I suppose, Sir, you don't deny that?"

"I really forget the amount," said Edward Grafton. "You asked me for some money, and I gave it you. You are quite welcome to it, and now let it be forgotten."

"It's not going to be forgotten, Mr. Grafton, at least by me, until I have justice done me. I asked you for the ten pound? I deny it. You gave it me for a purpose, I tell you, and I took it for a purpose, and I used it for a purpose, and you know that right well."

"I have not asked you how you used it, nor do I wish to know."

"Oh! we don't wish to know. But we shall know, whether we like it or not."

"Mrs. Faunt," said Edward, struggling to do his best for himself, "do not let us waste words. Drop this subject, and come up to the Rectory to-morrow. I know Mrs. Grafton will be glad to hear that you have returned, as we are now expecting visitors, and shall require your services. It was principally to say this that I came. And now, good-afternoon."

"Not quite so fast," said Mrs. Faunt, darting at the door with an agility which her figure did not promise. "Mr. Grafton, I will not have my feelings trampled upon. I know you and people like you think that their inferiors have no feelings, or that they can be made all right with a bit of gold, but you ought to know quite different, especially being a clergyman. If I am down, I have some pride left, and I will not be called a pauper, nor will I be told I had money given me for myself, when it was nothing but wages. You'll have to unsay those words, Sir."

Edward Grafton had the weakness to become irritated at the wrong moment, and the finding himself forcibly prevented from leaving the wretched cottage so enraged him that he said:

"If they were wages they were not earned, and you had better be glad to take them in a way that makes you out honest."

"That is another matter altogether, Sir," said Mrs. Faunt, almost respectfully. "And as you have unsaid your former words, which were unjust and uncalled for, and as you own that you paid me the money for a purpose of your own—that's so, Sir, is it not?"

"Well, go on."

"But that's so, Sir."

"Say so. Yes. I paid you for a purpose. Well?"

"Then it behooves me to clear myself, and show you that if I did not do what you sent me for it was none of my fault. But poor folks can be honest, Sir, and it is my intention to return you that money, taking out of it only my traveling expenses, which I kept as low as possible."

"Out of the question," said Edward Grafton. "I believe all that you say, without hearing any more, and I wish to hear no more. I am glad that you failed, and therefore there is no need of explanation. Be good enough to let me pass, as I have engagements."

"You are glad I failed, Mr. Grafton. Might I ask why?"

"The reasons are my own. I am not going to discuss the subject."

"But you will stay here, Mr. Grafton, until I have said my say. You are very anxious to get off, and to hush the matter up, but unless you hush me up by knocking me down and stunning me, which would scarcely be the correct thing in a clergyman, I don't see how you are to go till I please."

She had suggested the exact course which Edward Grafton felt inclined to take, but he had also weighed the objection raised by Mrs. Faunt.

"I am disgusted at your coarse and vulgar behavior, Mrs. Faunt. As a clergyman, my hands are tied, otherwise you have put yourself out of the right to the forbearance a man shows a woman."

"If you were not a parson you'd smash me, that's what you mean, in plain English. And you would like to do it for a better reason than because I keep you ten minutes from going to some engagement, very likely humbug. I have heard enough to know all about that. You made it up with the parties you sent me to try and injure, and you helped at the wedding, and now you want to forget all about the past. Well, that's all very right, only don't be in such a hurry to behave right to them while you behave wrong to me. I tried to do my best for you, and I did what would have answered your purpose ten times over, only I was too late. So I kept counsel till I could see you again."

"Whatever you learned keep to yourself, and be sure that I shall ask you for none of it."

"Well, if you return the article on my hands,

I don't see that I am bound to keep it to myself. It's of no use to me. I have a right to sell it to my best advantage, and I shall too."

"Sell what?" said Edward, a new form of terror coming across his vision.

"There it is at last," cried Mrs. Faunt, with a little triumphant laugh. "I said I thought I might be able to offer something interesting, but it took a long time to get the gentleman to look at my wares. Why, Sir, didn't I say to you, in this very cottage, only I was sitting on that table you are leaning against, and I beg you'll take the chair if more comfortable—no, Sir, don't say that, because it doesn't sound pretty from a parson—but didn't I say to you that I believed I knew that about a certain gentleman as would ruin his chances with a certain lady? Wasn't that my word, Mr. Grafton?"

"I believe so."

"You remember it well, I see. And did you not say in answer that you felt it would be the right thing to ascertain the truth? You won't eat your own words, I am sure, Sir."

"What's the good of this sort of thing, Mrs. Faunt?" said Edward, chafing, yet not liking to give utterance to his anger for fear of further compromising work which he saw to be probable, and wondered he had not thought more about.

"Nay, Mr. Grafton, please let us go on step by step, and then we shall understand every thing. Did not you say that the truth ought to be ascertained?"

"Yes. I am very sorry I did."

"I don't know why you should be sorry, Sir. I did ascertain the truth. And if you had known it in time you could have stopped the marriage instead of helping at it, and I take it that the stopping would have been much more agreeable to your feelings than the helping, though I am told you behaved awfully well, and like a brother giving away a beloved sister to the man of her heart. You would have had the pleasure of giving the young lady to some other man, or perhaps of taking her yourself."

He was obliged to listen to the woman now. The new train of ideas which he had called up, and which he cursed himself for not having awakened before, compelled him to endure this coarse woman's coarse talk. He was even anxious that she should go on, for he wished to know what he had to dread for Magdalen.

"I am not keeping you here, Sir, against your will, I hope," she said, standing away from the door.

She opened it, and a flood of afternoon sunshine burst into the squalid house, and made it suddenly cheerful.

"There! Having let the light into the house, I will now let it into your mind, Mr. Grafton, if you'll excuse my wit; or since you won't take the chair, and I couldn't in manners sit while a gentleman who behaves like one is standing, perhaps you will come out into the garden, as there are two seats."

He followed her out. What else could he do?

"Yes, Mr. Grafton," she said, "that was so. What would you have given to know, a week before the wedding, that—"

We need not repeat her story, because we know all about it. We need only give its key word. This was Lucy.

Having listened, Edward Grafton was silent, and Mrs. Faunt sat watching the effect of her communication upon him. He continued silent until she grew impatient. But she did not know what thoughts were working, and when she spoke again he started.

"You would like to know why I could not get this precious secret to you, Sir. It's rather a long story, and turns upon the conduct of some who had no right to act as they did, and on whom I'd say I would take my revenge if I were not speaking to a clergyman. And just now you are not thinking of me, I fancy?"

"No. Yes. Now, Mrs. Faunt, a word more. I told you truly when I said I was glad you had failed; and now I know what you have told me, and which I suppose to be true, though we have only your word for it, by-the-way—"

"And you would be glad if it was false. Yes, you have changed, Mr. Grafton, if you are telling the truth. If that is rude, it was not unprovoked. But the story is true enough, Sir. I saw her with my own eyes, and the children, as pretty as you ever saw, and the gentleman's picture hanging up, and a hat with his name in it, and a book with his writing in it, which I took the liberty of borrowing, in case you might like to compare it with the writing in the book we saw a certain lady reading just where I sit."

"Assuming it to be true, I wish absolute silence preserved on the subject. The wedding has taken place, and the revelation would only cause useless pain."

"Then you will buy my ware, Sir?"

"What do you mean?"

"You can't think you have bought it already, Mr. Grafton, with that paltry ten pounds. That was only the payment of the carriage. But it's hotter out here than I had thought, and I must ask you to step in again if you have any thing more to say to me. I have nothing more at present to say to you, but I hope you will honor me with a visit now and then."

Mrs. Faunt went into the cottage, and was hastily followed by the young clergyman.

"What are your terms?" he said.

"My terms for what, Sir? For leaving you the full and exclusive power over the secret you sent me to find out?"

"Yes; that, exactly."

"A hundred pounds. But pay it just when convenient to yourself. I am not in want of the money."

"I might manage the money. But as soon as it is paid you will demand more, or threaten to divulge."

"That's a very uncharitable suspicion, Sir, and if I were to imitate you I should refuse to have any more dealings with you, and take my goods to another market. It is not open yet,

but it soon will be, I hear. You understand, I dare say?"

"Name no names, and forget the habit. You shall have the money, but I can not well pay it for a fortnight or so."

"Don't inconvenience yourself, Mr. Grafton. A little now and then will answer my purpose. You could not let me have five pounds now, I suppose?"

"Yes, I can," said Edward Grafton, taking a note from his *porte-monnaie.*

"I asked you to put that up, if you remember, the first time you took it out, Sir, or have you forgotten?"

He had not forgotten, and he bitterly remembered saying to himself that when people of the humbler class refuse your money it is usually because they intend to have a good deal more out of you than your intended gift. It was signally true in poor Edward Grafton's case, and as he handed over the note he wished that he had been warned. Had he defied Mrs. Faunt when all that she knew was the scene between himself and Magdalen, there would have been trouble for him, but little for her.

"A London note—thanks, Sir; but you have not one of our country notes?"

"No, but this is all right. I took it at Chervil's, the chemist's, in exchange for a check. His name is on it. I can't give you gold."

"It's no matter, Sir. It will do as well as gold, and better. Do you wish me to call at the Rectory to-morrow?"

"If you like," said Edward Grafton, who had invented the wish of his mother.

"Very good, Sir. And I will only say that you may sleep quite easy, and dream as happily as you like. The secret is safe with me as long as I am properly treated, and I am sure that you will always do that."

"I trust you, Mrs. Faunt," said the Reverend Edward Grafton, leaving the cottage.

"But I don't trust you, Mr. Grafton," said Mrs. Faunt. She rushed to the bed, which was in the same room, but standing in a recess of some obscurity.

"Here," she said, hastily tugging at the shoulder of somebody who had been latent in the darkness, "you haven't dared to go to sleep, have you? Say yes, and I'll turn you out into the road, cripple or no cripple, just as your drunken wife did."

"I'm awake, m'm, I'm awake, and has been."

"And you listened, you old fool?"

"Listened to every word as you'd let me hear. It stands to reason I couldn't hear when you took him into the open, don't it, m'm?"

"In course. I took him there because I didn't want you to hear that part of the story. It would have been too bad for you, shocked you, don't you see?"

"I see, m'm. You're a deep one, you are. And when you brought him back again then I were to listen again. Which I done."

"Then, Jull, you heard Mr. Grafton say that he hired me with ten sovereigns to go to London and find out a secret for him which he hoped would prevent a certain marriage. And you also heard him bargain that the secret was to be in his own power, and he was to give me a hundred pounds for keeping it, and he gave me a five-pound note on account, with Chervil's name on it. Is that right?"

"Right as ninepence, m'm," said Jull.

"Then you say that over to yourself till you are sure you will never forget it. For if you forget a word of it when I want it remembered I will poison you, Jull, as quietly as I ever poisoned your wife's cats."

"No, you wouldn't, m'm. I know that. But I'll not forget it, m'm, nor your kindness in taking me in when my wife as is a worse cat than any you say you poisoned as may be true, and I bear no malice but I do against her as could turn a cripple into the road."

"She was too drunk to know it was you, Jull, and she has been raging about like a mad thing, and nobody will tell her where you are. I shall take care of you, don't fear, old man. I'm not afraid of losing my reputation. I'll give you something to drink that will open your eyes, Jull."

It was in no Naybury brandy that the respectable couple drank prosperity to the Church of England, coupling with that toast the name of the Reverend Edward Grafton.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOME AGAIN.

THE Scottish tour was a complete success, and at its end Ernest and Margaret returned with the Conways to their house.

They had all felt inclined to make the return journey quickly, and little time was lost between the landing at Greenock and the arrival at Naybury.

Mr. and Mrs. Conway were happy in the thought of finally settling with their child and the man of their choice in the home which it was to be the future business of the parents' lives to make a happy place for the younger couple. Magdalen had formed her own plan, had resolved on her own course, and felt glad that she was approaching the home where she meant silently and affectionately to work for the love which she was sure that she deserved, but was not so sure that she should obtain. Ernest Dormer was the only one of the party who did not seem to enjoy the rapid return, and he often lapsed into a thoughtfulness which was not lost upon his young wife. But at a word from her he aroused, and for the time became again the most delightful of traveling companions. His attention and devotion never flagged save at these intervals of silence, and we who know the pledge he had given to Walter Latrobe that he would behave to his wife with all the respect and kindness in his power, may credit him with having

thus far fulfilled his engagement as became a gentleman.

The carriage met them at the station, and in a few minutes more, on a lovely autumn afternoon, Ernest was handing out his wife. She pressed his hand as she smilingly acknowledged the welcome of the servants, and then she lingered in the hall while Dormer assisted her mother to alight. Mr. Conway, according to his custom of doing things in a different way from other people, let himself out at the opposite door, and came round behind the carriage. He looked at Mrs. Conway, and it was clear that some little speech had been arranged between them.

It was soon said. Conway took one of Ernest's hands, and Mrs. Conway took the other, and the mother said, "This is your house and Maggie's, dear, remember that; and the more you show that you remember it the gladder you will make the old people."

"And I told him that," murmured Magdalen, over her mother's shoulder.

And Ernest Dormer, for the first time in his life perhaps, had no ready answer to make; but it was not because he did not feel the honest kindness of his wife's parents. Moreover, they saw that he felt it, and that was enough.

Mrs. Conway speedily disappeared, eager on household cares, but Magdalen lingered with the men in the little parlor.

"Well, child, are you not going to take your things off?" said Mr. Conway. "Oh, I see. We want Ernest to go with us into his library on the first occasion of our visit. It is a long time since I thought of such superstitions, but you see I remember them."

"And who would not go into the garden, after it had been newly laid out, until mamma could go with him?" asked Magdalen, with a saucy laugh.

"Ah, but that was because I wanted to be ready to defend myself for some departures from orders, Sauciness," said her father. "Be off with you! Ernest, I told them to put any letters for you on your library table. There is one, I know. I think I mentioned it the day we met."

Ernest was quite sure of it, and had been thinking about it for many a mile, having been told whose name was in the corner of the letter. He had a double reason for being disturbed about it, partly because it would probably make him miserable, and partly because it might be written in an unguarded way; and if he should not be able to keep it from his wife's eye—

However, they went up to the room on which the Conways had spent so much affectionate care, and Ernest, who had resolved to do his best, had the resolution to lead Magdalen to the window, and say something kindly about the place before turning to the desk.

There were four or five letters, however, and this helped him.

"Come," he said, "I am glad that some of my friends have had the grace to send me congratulations. I must look over them, and any which are warm enough and respectful enough I will read to you, madam."

He swept up the batch, thrust them carelessly into his pocket, and began to admire some of the details of the room.

"It is the pleasantest room in England, dear," he said. "I won't say that it is pleasanter than one room in Scotland, because we *did* enjoy ourselves there so much and so long that we mustn't be ungrateful. But is it not delightful?"

"If we do not find it so it will not be mamma's and papa's fault," said Magdalen.

That was not exactly what she would have said at another time, but the little episode of the letters had jarred upon her for the moment. It was not the sensation which she had felt in the Highland cottage on the morning when Ernest had momentarily hesitated to give her the note from her father. That little act she had the sense to see was a mere relic of habit, but since that time she believed that they had become much better acquainted with one another, and yet the first thing he did on returning home was to establish the privacy of his correspondence. Do not forget, husbands and wives who no more trouble your heads about one another's letters than about one another's looks, that Magdalen was a very young wife.

But she was also a very good young wife, and instead of feeding annoyance (the animal is one that flourishes amazingly on nutriment) she pushed the large chair toward him, and said, with a smile, "There, Sir, sit down and read your letters, and extract all the pretty messages sent to me, while I dress and see that mamma is taking care about dinner."

He sat down—received a light kiss on the forehead—and was alone.

But he would not open his letter—the one he wanted to read. Magdalen might run back playfully and look over his shoulder, he thought. It was the very last thing which Magdalen would have done at that moment, and if he had seen the gravity which had come upon the beautiful face in the next room he would have felt that he could have read undisturbed.

But he left the library, forcing himself to hum a gay air, and went out into the garden. He sat down where Magdalen herself had sat on the day she received a certain letter from him; and as she had been lovingly watched on that day, and each expression of her face had been noted, so was Ernest watched, but by a pair of the sweetest eyes in the world.

"Stop," said Magdalen to herself. "Ought I to watch? It is only that I may know whether he is troubled. But he should tell me of his troubles; I have no right to surprise a confidence."

And she turned from the window.

She would have learned but little had she continued to look at him. He opened Colonel Latrobe's letter, now of old date, slowly, and found that it contained a very few lines. For Walter Latrobe, as his friend might have remembered, was a man of the world, and had had a good

deal of correspondence of his own, much of it in language which might or might not be a guarantee of good faith—that as it might happen—but which was not necessarily intended for publication. He knew the mischief which a perfectly innocent letter, misread, or read by green eyes, does every day, and he also knew a good deal of the effects of accidents which, in the justice of fate, some time or another attend letters which are not perfectly innocent. Therefore, like a wise but unrighteous young officer, he had complied with a request of Ernest's, but had done so in the safest manner. His letter ran thus:

"Octagon.

"My Dear Benedick,—Just a line to say that all is as it should be. Your traps are duly taken care of. Let us know when you come back. Yours ever,

"Walter Latrobe.

"P.S. As you never were a racing man, it is no good giving you tips, but if you care to know that *Lady of the Hut* is all right, *Mopes* in good form, and *Dormouse* 'howling' well, you are hereby told how to lay out your money. You may rely on this."

The other letters were of no particular importance, except one from Mr. Mangles, who intimated to his friend that the *Vivisector* was still open to him, and who added an apology to Mrs. Ernest for supposing that her husband had a moment of thought for any body or any thing in the world but herself and his new home. The last words were an appropriate sequel, Ernest thought, to the sporting postscript in which Walter Latrobe had conveyed his message.

Presently Magdalen came out into the garden, with her pretty head uncovered, and with an unmistakable tint of acquired brown upon her fair face. For Mrs. Conway had put an end to the indoors and under-trees business, and had made the party "do" mountain and flood, lake-side and valley, in a very energetic way.

"Come," said Ernest, smiling, "I hope mamma is satisfied now. I would not let you spoil your complexion, but she has not been so careful."

"And is it spoiled, Sir?"

"That is not the face I saw in Naybury church, any how. But you look the picture of health, whatever that means."

"If you have not a better compliment for me than that in your letters you may keep it to yourself. And is that the way to treat letters, strewing envelopes in the path in one direction, and the contents in another? I thought you said you were tidy, Sir. May I pick them up?"

"*May* you? No, on second thoughts you may not," said Ernest, rising and gallantly placing her in his chair. He then threw all the letters into her lap.

She had come out resolving to ask to see the letters, not, of course, that she had any childish curiosity as to their contents, but because she was anxious to afford him every opportunity of cultivating the confidence she thirsted for. There was more courage in the good girl's little words than may appear. She knew that she was risking a possible avoidance of her request, and this would have hurt her much. When he said that she might not pick up the notes her heart beat rapidly for a moment, but when they came down in a shower some silly tears were very nearly following their example.

"Oh, Ernest! My nice clean dress, and your dusty letters."

Are not they all consummate little hypocrites, thank Providence?

"I don't think that they are very dusty," said Ernest, prétending gravity. "There is a civil message, that on the top, to you from Sam Mangles, who thinks, I suppose, that he won your heart by his wedding-speech."

"It was a good one," said Magdalen.

"I thought somebody told me that she heard none of them."

"But I won't have what I say remembered in that manner, Sir," replied his wife, with her little frown, which as usual became smile, as she went on. "No, I can not even now recollect attending to any thing, but papa has said two or three times that it was excellent, which means, I know, that it praised your wife very much. What a good hand Mr. Mangles writes!"

"Yes, he does. The faculty is not considered, as I have often told him, the sign of a good man."

"Nonsense, dear. Why, you write a beautiful hand."

"And I am not a good man."

"Don't say these things, even in fun, dearest," said Magdalen, in a low voice. "Please don't."

"Well, then, I will be a very good man," replied Ernest. "I ought to be. Ah, I thought that would puzzle you," said the good man, as his young wife looked inquiringly at the note from Walter Latrobe.

"Yes, 'your traps.' What does he mean, Ernest? You don't mean that you are going to set traps for my poor little birds about here, because I know that you hate any thing unkind. You won't do that?"

"My dear child, fast slang has not formed part of your education—all the girls talk it now, but I don't care about giving you lessons. However, to remove your terrors, know that traps means property, and the property in question consists of a chair or two, a desk, and a few things of that kind, which I asked Latrobe to look after. See that blackbird—he was evidently listening for the explanation, and now he has flown away to tell the others."

"Very well, Sir. I must remember. I will astonish papa at dinner, and tell him that we have found all our traps in order. But just look here. Talk of a lady's postscript. Here are three lines of note, and seven to follow."

"Latrobe is a lady's man, and has caught lady-ways."

"Don't you be rude, Sir. And is this slang, too? You were never a racing man. I should

hope not, dear. No use sending you tips. Tips of what, Ernest dear?"

"Private hints as to the horses likely to win," said Ernest Dormer, didactically.

"What a capital word! How could I use that to papa? It would not do at chess, would it?"

"Why, not particularly well; but if you are bent on using it, I'll tell you what a young lady said to me at dinner one day. When the *entrées* came round she avoided all but one, and strongly advised me to take that—it was sweetbread, I think. My brother Frank feeds here very often, she said, and he knows what they can cook. He gave me the straight tip."

"Feeds here! Is that a young lady's word?"

"Well, it is rather better than grubs, and I've heard that from a young lady."

"I am sometimes afraid, Ernest, that you have kept very lively company, and that I must seem very tame to you."

"My dear child, if I had ever heard you say feed or grub I don't suppose I should be here now. The girls don't know what men think of that sort of thing, or what fun they make of it at the club, carrying out the slang to topics the girls don't dream of, and adding 'as Miss Chose would say.' But I ought not to tell you of these matters, they are, thank God! so utterly out of your atmosphere."

"And when you say thank God," asked Magdalen, slowly, gently, and sweetly, and fixing her soft eyes on him, "may I think that you really mean that you are pleased with my ignorance, and you do not say so only to please me?"

His answer was given in a low tone, and it made her smile.

"Very well, then, I shall not try my new words on papa. I shall only keep them for you when you find yourself dull. And now what's this about the 'Lady of the Hut'— Oh, I understand. That is what you are to lay out your money upon—you won't, though. And 'Mopes is in good form;' I can understand that, too—at least it means praise. But why 'Dormouse' should be said to be howling I can't think."

Ernest Dormer could quite well, and home memories came upon him. But he explained that howling was but another contribution to the well of English undefiled.

"Ernest, I wonder what Mrs. Bulliman would say to me if I answered her inquiry some morning and said I was howling well. Did you ever hear a young lady say that, now?"

"I have heard one say that a certain partner was a howling good waltzer. I told him so, and he was pleased to reply that she was scraggy, but not half a bad fellow."

And Magdalen's look of genuine astonishment made Ernest laugh, though he ought not to have been in any mood to laugh. What business had he to let his innocent young wife read that note, and puzzle out her harmless interpretation of it, while he hypocritically assented?

None. And yet do him the justice to be sure that but for a consideration that may have appeared to him stronger than it may seem to us he would not have done this. Ernest Dormer was the last man willfully to practice on the trustfulness of a good girl, or to derive the slightest pleasure from the success of a deceit. He would gladly have destroyed the letter. But he had twice noted that he had given Magdalen pain—or at least vexation, by his seeming to hold back his correspondence. He knew she had been aware that Walter Latrobe's letter awaited him, and that she had noticed it on the table. Finding that it was nothing but a riddle, Ernest Dormer deliberately preferred to let her spell out the puzzle to leaving on her mind the impression that he had received a secret epistle which he was unwilling to impart to her. The humiliation of the false position he took upon himself; he avoided the withholding from her a proof of confidence, because he felt that it would have grieved her had he done so. We are not concerned to accuse or to defend him.

"Well, it is a new language," said Magdalen, joining in the laugh. "But you shall not give me any more lessons in it, unless you wish. And you are not to lay out your money on the Lady of the Hut, unless you wish. You don't think that I am presuming to dictate to you, Ernest dear—what do I know about such matters?"

"But I insist on your dictation in all matters. There. And now I'll gather up my letters, which you are pleased to call dusty. That one, by-the-way, in the stiff hand, is to inform me that it is proposed to place me on the Committee of the Octagon Club, but I shall write up and decline the honor."

"Why should you decline any honor, dear?"

"I did not use the word seriously, but it is a sort of distinction among one's fellows. But I don't want it. If I am to be of any use I should have to run up to London now and then, and that I do not wish to do, you know."

"But I wish you should, whenever it gives you any pleasure. I do not want you to cut yourself off from old friends and old habits for my sake. I hope you will go up at any time, and only think, while you are away, that somebody will be very glad when you come back."

At this moment the bells of the old church broke out into a merry peal.

"Not quite the Highlands," said Mr. Conway, coming out to the young couple, "but I think better in some respects. You never heard such musical bells as those all the time we were away."

"What can they be ringing for?" said Magdalen.

"My modest child, you do not seem aware of your own importance or of your husband's. That is your welcome home. Some of the people here have set them going—all I have had to say in the matter is that I heartily wished they would do nothing of the sort."

"It is very kind," said Magdalen, smiling. "Do you mind it, Ernest? if you do papa would get them to stop."

"Mind it, dear, not in the least. It is a proof, I suppose, that you have been very good to your neighbors, and that they are glad to see you back among them."

"And you."

"No, I don't think that I am included in this demonstration. I may deserve to be rung at some day. At present they take me on trust."

"As I did," whispered his wife.

"Yes. And they have better vouchers for me than you had."

Mrs. Conway next came forth. The good woman pretended to be vexed that the bells were ringing, but in her heart she was delighted at this testimony of the allegiance of Naybury.

"Stupid things!" she said, laughing.

"I like that," said Mr. Conway. "When you thought that I was going to tell the ringers that I wouldn't have it you made the most menacing gestures, mamma. That clang rejoices your ears, so don't deny it. You are like the mother in the 'Cotter's Saturday Night,'

"'Weel pleased to see her bairn's respectit like the lave.'"

"The bairn's a very good bairn," said Mrs. Conway, shamefully evading the question.

"Pretty well for that," said the father, "but you have no longer any right to praise or to blame her. She is answerable solely—to borrow some more from Mr. Burns—to that strappin' youth that took the mother's eye. I wonder how long those blockheads will go on tugging before they think that they have earned their beer?"

"My dear William, let the poor things please themselves."

"Well, it saves trouble. All Naybury and the parts round about are being made aware that we are again in residence. I had rather schemed for a quiet day or two, that we might look about us and get rid of the Scotch accent. But no matter. Any news from town, Ernest?"

"None worth telling, I think," said Dormer.

"Unless you want to put your money on any race-horses, papa, in which case we know, Ernest and I, of a howling horse."

The pretty emphasis with which she gave out the abominable word, and the prettier pride which she affected in looking round as if she had done a great thing, were irresistible in their gravity.

"A howling horse, child. The howl would soon come from me, I suspect, if I began betting at my time of life. Do you care much about that sort of thing, Dormer?" said Mr. Conway, preparing to make himself uncomfortable.

"Not a bit," said Ernest, "beyond understanding the talk of the men about me. Magdalen is not alarmed."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Conway; "but I dare say her father thinks that because you know one horse from another you must be going to ride for the Derby next week."

"Come, I know better than that, mamma. Here is autumn, and I do know that the Derby comes about May," said Mrs. Ernest, to draw off the attack, though she had wished that her father had not put his question, which she perfectly well comprehended to mean that he hoped his son-in-law was not a racing man. "I suppose you have heard no Naybury news, mamma," she continued.

"I have not had much time, but I have heard one or two things."

"Have you heard any thing about Saxbury?" said Mr. Conway, provokingly.

"Perhaps I have, but I shall keep it to myself."

"Then it is something to the disadvantage of the Rector, and we are not to have it until the good news is confirmed. And have you taken any steps toward ascertaining whether it was really liquorice or an ipecacuanha lozenge that the child left in Saxbury church the night the servant heard the gold that the woman had got from the curate?"

"That is nearer the mark; but I tell you I won't say any thing about it until I know more. There is a very strange story about."

"And therefore, as a stranger, give it welcome," said Mr. Conway. "And any how let us come in out of the noise of those joy-bells."

So, and upon such terms, Magdalen and Ernest became established in their home at Naybury.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TAKING STOCK.

"No run was ever got over so fast as on paper," wrote one of the few writers who could make a sporting novel readable by persons of the non-horsey sort. We may also say that no incidents of life ever trod so closely on one another's heels as we are allowed to make them do in narrative. There comes the crowded hour, and then many a long day of inaction. *Petimusque damusque vicissim*, and the reader who would obtain a true impression of the workings of the circumstances which a writer seeks to describe will exercise Heaven's best gift of patience when the author, for his own purposes, appears to linger on his way. In return, that forbearance should be at fitting time rewarded by the writer's "calling upon" his steed (in the gentle phrase which means steel and whip-cord in merciless play) and hurrying at the best pace to the goal.

It may be that at no distant date we shall find Ernest Dormer and his wife, and some others of whom we have heard, in presence of more exciting agencies than those which at the time we speak of were at work. But the period succeeding the marriage and the settlement at Naybury was one of quietude. The young couple had to receive the felicitations of their acquaintance, and to accept their hospitalities, which in due course were returned at the house of the Conways. Ernest Dormer did not, it must be owned, enter much into the kind of avocations

which had been humorously suggested to him by his father-in-law, but he took sufficient interest in Naybury doings to be able to discuss them with those for whom Naybury was all the world, and if this sort of thing bored him he took his revenge very secretly—except as regarded his wife—making the local trivialities and the local view of life very sufficing texts for contributions to the journal of his friend Mr. Mangles. Magdalen, who alone was aware of the authorship of a series of acute and not over-cynical papers upon "Demoralization," in which Ernest depicted that process in action upon the nature of an able man settled among rustics, ah Ovid among the Goths, was happy to be certain that no such detrimental operation was being performed upon her accomplished husband, and that his vivid lamentations touching the decay of his powers only showed that they were in very good order. With this exception Dormer did little literary work, but he read a good deal, and moreover devoted much time to reading with Magdalen, into whose fresh mind her father had instilled more ideas than are usually latent in one so young, and who showed herself capable of benefiting largely by the companionship and conversation of Ernest Dormer. As time went on, and the young couple passed from the more demonstrative season of loverhood into that of apparently earnest affection, both were conscious that their lot had fallen in pleasant places, but they accepted their fortune differently.

For Magdalen, her sweet nature and her religious principle alike prompted her to own herself fortunate, and to be thankful, and at all events in the presence of others, and notably of her husband, that cheerfulness which is "the best of all the gifts" was never wanting. Society pronounced her to be perfectly happy, her parents delighted to believe her so, and Ernest knew no better than to ask himself why she should not be, and to obtain no reply. Whether she were happy or not, there were times of no rare recurrence when she was very thoughtful. If hers were a heaven, it was not the heathen heaven of unextinguishable laughter, or rather she was the Psyche into whose cup some single drop had fallen which brought the cloud to her face where all other faces were smiling. But such moments were her own, and even her husband knew not of them. Still they came, and in her quiet room her glass often reflected a face grave almost to sadness. We have known that she was habituated to self-communion, self-examination. This habit had been natural to her, but it had been confirmed by her adopting a portion of the religious practices which she had learned, much approving them, from her young Catholic friends in Wales. The custom is inculcated by a certain part of Protestant society, but is not much in favor with the majority. It is not necessary to say whether it be advantageous or not, our sole business is with its influence upon our Magdalen, and her history in the after-time. Perhaps it is wisest, certainly it is worldly-wisest, to let by-gones be by-gones, and to accept the present without much scrutiny, and to take no thought for the morrow. Yet the greatest of philosophers has enjoined upon us the faith that in a perfect recollection of our yesterday, and a certainty of the wisdom of our to-day, is the only safeguard against our to-morrow, and is one with the aid of which we are justified in defying the future. There was no choice for Magdalen Dormer; the habit was hers, and she could not lay it down if she would. She thought much and often of the past and of the future.

As regarded the one great womanly need, the sense of being loved, it may be said that Magdalen, with much sadness, had convinced herself that what she had dreamed of, what she had meant by love, was not destined to be hers. She had not resigned, and she never would resign the belief, that as Ernest came to know her inner heart, and its loyalty and affection, he would repay her patience and devotion with all of which he was capable, and this belief became her great treasure and support. But this, of course, was far from a girl's ideal. She had dreamed of an unrestrained and lavish love, as passionate as tender, of an entire surrender of separate thought and will, of a confidence that meant absolute union of soul. It matters not in what school these fancies had been learned, or whether they were the spontaneous product of a warm and generous nature. There, in Magdalen's heart, they had been rooted, and it now became her duty to pluck them up one by one, as noxious flowers that must be extirpated lest they infect the atmosphere with enervating odor. This was hard, very hard, upon one so young; but Magdalen saw her way to duty, and prepared to do it.

Yes, it was hard, and the more so that Magdalen could find no reply to the questions which she could not help putting to herself, in spite of all her humility, "Why can he not love me? And if he did not love me, why did he marry me?"

Not for a moment did she do Ernest the injustice, as she supposed it, of believing that his marriage had been dictated by considerations of worldly interest. Magdalen knew, of course, that in this point of view the union had been a good one for Dormer. She had been aware of the liberality of the Stepneys, but she had no reason to imagine that it would not equally have been shown had Ernest selected any other bride who might have been worthy of him, and she doubted not that many another girl would have been proud to accept his hand. In other respects, she generously admitted that his marriage involved some self-sacrifice, especially in regard to the condition that he should reside with her parents in an obscure country town; he, who had been admitted to the best society in London, and whose friends were of an intellectual class not to be found in Naybury. That he had thought much of the wealth which the young couple would inherit at the death of her parents she could not believe, and here she was right. We will not say that all these consider-

ations did not come before her in her hours of thought, but we may say as unhesitatingly that none of them worked with her to Ernest's disadvantage, but that, on the contrary, she found in them reason to think more highly than ever of his motives in wedding her.

More highly; yes, but not more agreeably. When the poor young wife had cleared away all obstacles to the belief that at least his choice had been disinterested she had only brought out in bolder relief the thoughts which made her unhappy. If he had only liked her, as her instinct told her that it was most natural he should do, why had not that original liking grown into something more approaching her ideal? Magdalen was no romance-believing idiot, with a faith in love at first sight, and the meeting one's fate. Such things were, no doubt, but she held them to be exceptional. She would have been quite content, nay, she would have been profoundly happy, to have heard from Ernest, or to have felt without hearing the avowal, that he had at first seen nothing in her but a charming girl capable of making a man's happiness. But that she should make no advance in his affections after his discovery of her true nature was a bitter thought indeed.

Had he discovered it? With all her honesty of purpose Magdalen would willingly have blinded herself to the truth that he had. Gladly would she have believed that Ernest had, either from some slowness of nature, some want of appreciation of women, as yet failed to see that she deserved all his love. It would have been every thing to convince herself that his love only slumbered, and that it would one day be awakened by the gentle music of her own. To think this would have been for Magdalen to abstain from all murmur, to hush every feeling of pride, and to wait in modest but sure hope until her reward should come. But she could not deceive herself into this Paradise. Ernest Dormer was no common man, and he had shown that the subtler apprehension of the beauty of womanly nature was possessed by him in a high degree. He was no passionate boy, to be dazzled by personal charms while blind to spiritual graces. He was no cold and cautious man, willing to accept any lavish homage from a woman, but hesitating to compromise his dignity by meeting her with an equal devotion. Magdalen had lived with Ernest but a few months, but they had been long enough to show her that he could understand, could appreciate, could love all that was lovable. In their earnest talk amidst the Scotch woods and over the books at home she had heard him speak of woman's love, of its ebb and flood, of its tenderness and its power, of its nobleness and of its weakness, as he only could speak who had the gift of loving. Then why had she failed to be all she longed to be?

For—it is needless to say it to those who have loved—she now loved him.

We have seen that it was not so always. We followed her to her chamber in her maiden days, when she took thither a letter from her affianced lover, and we saw her give sorrowful way to her conviction that he had not the passion she wished to find in him; and we heard her say that she would have loved him so well. Things have changed with her, though not with him. The work which she had hoped to accomplish with him had been wrought upon herself. The manliness, the gentleness, the knowledge, and the lighter graces in Ernest Dormer had told upon his wife's nature, and from an admiring girl she had become an attached woman. And she knew it, and was proud of it. "But I have been better to him," she murmured, "than he has been to me. I liked him, and I love him. He likes me still."

She had one hope left, but we will not as yet bring into the sunshine that delicate flower.

Meantime Ernest should never know that he had been weighed and found wanting. Perhaps God might be very good to her, and give her all she desired, and pardon all her impatience, and if that day should come it should not be clouded for Ernest by the knowledge that he had made her unhappy while she waited the dawning.

Poor girl! she thought that she had a secret, but it was none to Ernest Dormer. He, of another nature than hers, knew well how much and how little he was giving, and he could have told her simple story in her own words. It did not need the high intellect with which she credited him to discover to him their exact relations. That he did not love her of course he had known throughout the whole time of their acquaintance; that she had found out this was a revelation that broke slowly upon him, so well had Magdalen played her wifely part of innocent hypocrisy and of sedulous endeavour to please him. But it came upon him, and thenceforth he saw the truth in every act and word of hers, and often, indeed, it was more present to him than to her when in some happier moment she yielded to the belief that they were one. It may be that he had hoped for another thing. He may have under-estimated the instinct of Magdalen, and believed that the show of love, which few could present more fairly than himself, would have deceived her into happiness, as it deceives thousands of wives and of husbands for their good and comfort. She had seen but little of the world, and had been brought up in purity and trustfulness, and the man of the world may have imagined that the lessons of the heart are not taught except in the school where its vices are also learned. And if this were not his belief he may have under-estimated her sensibility, and may have thought that though concious that she was not the idol a wife should be, Magdalen would be content to accept the ordinary homage of a husband against whose kindness the worst that can be said is that it is only kindness. This again, as he was well aware, many a wife is glad to do, and harsh he knew would be the chidings of her friends did they hear her complain that

she was defrauded of her hope. That none would ever hear Magdalen complain Ernest was assured, and the thought that the female Philistines of her acquaintance should ever have to pronounce the doom of convention against the foolish woman who could not be happy with so kind a man Dormer would have rejected with angry contempt. But he had seen a good deal of women, and in that little phrase is contained many a hateful doctrine—in Ernest's case the doctrine might have been that after a time a right-minded woman will settle down with any thing that is not actually wrong rather than make a fuss. It is a bit of the coarse ethics of life, and perhaps it has worked better on the whole than is satisfactory to persons of deep feeling.

We may have lighted on the truth in regard to Ernest Dormer's mental attitude toward his wife. As regarded himself, a change had come upon him since his impassioned declaration to Walter Latrobe that since his engagement to Magdalen he had been utterly miserable. He had been miserable, and we in some sort know why, nor is it needful to enter upon his misery. Habits, a strong sentiment, household memories, and perhaps that strangely powerful bond, the having struggled and sorrowed in fellowship with another, had all exerted their natural but unrighteous influence, and it had wrought painfully upon Ernest Dormer. Far be it from us to say that he deserved pity, or that his suffering had been any thing but part of the just retribution which we know always attends wrong actions in this admirable world. We are only telling his story—and this is a story for grown-up people, and not for the unformed or uninformed. There was the fact, Dormer had been exceedingly unhappy, so unhappy that his most intimate—we will not say his best—friend had augured unfavorably for the marriage. But no acute suffering lasts long, and the world is full of anodynes for those who have the courage to take them. Ernest married, and was very fortunate in marriage. He received into his arms a beautiful girl, as good as she was beautiful, and as affectionate as a modest English wife may be. The scene and the habits of his life were suddenly and totally changed, and in a fresh station and among new friends he was engaged in agreeable occupation. Ernest Dormer found himself forgetting his previous state of mind, and moreover, having a strong will upon which he could call sternly when he chose, he habitually and successfully repelled the old thoughts, and resolutely occupied himself with the new. We have seen how he devoted himself to his bride, and his devotion, though it mellowed into something less demonstrative, lost none of its irreproachable character in these early months of her wifehood. We have said, too, that he interested himself in what was around him, and that he had recovered his mental vigor to the extent of being able to satirize, for the London scorners, the twaddlers of Naybury. He was not happy, but he was able to resist unhappiness, and Magdalen became more and more pleasant to him every day. He almost began to wish that he could love his wife, and he certainly wished that in the mean time she would think that he did.

Yet Ernest Dormer, although, like a man, he had imitated Magdalen Conway, who, like a woman, had married without loving, and although, again like a man, he had fallen infinitely short of the womanly nobleness which at once set itself to love and to deserve love, had his own ideal of marriage, and it was not realized for him. In some sense, and allowing for the measureless inferiority of the standard which a man of the world sets for himself to that of a high-minded and pure woman, the thoughts of Ernest and of Magdalen on this matter were not so unlike as may be supposed. His ideal was of an absolute union, with a oneness of heart and of purpose, with, of course, an unasserted but irresistible sway vested in the husband, but a generously-given love on both sides, rendering submission even more agreeable than direction. Into his conception of love it is not necessary to go, and if it involved any thing more or less than the idea of Magdalen, we may leave the outline to be dealt with by his own hand at the fitting time. It is but just to him to say that he regarded their present relations as no fulfillment of the marriage vow, and there were seasons when he murmured, not in the gentle spirit of Magdalen, that his ideal was not realized—as if he had deserved that it should be. And for Dormer was reserved that which man resents most, the keen sense that his dissatisfaction was entirely of his own causing. His wife was all that man could wish for, but he did not love her. He could not. And he well knew why. But in the bitterest of his moments he never laid the blame upon his innocent and affectionate wife. A worse or a stupider man would have sought to find reasons in the character or in some part of the conduct of Magdalen. Ernest Dormer never deceived himself, never did injustice to her—at least in these times.

Before making the "call" to which we adverted a few pages back, it has been thought well that the relations of this man and wife should be comprehended. If we have been successful in setting them out we know not that they will appear very unfavorable to the majority of readers. They are such as many a gifted novelist, also a subtle-souled psychologist, would not object to at the close of his fiction. He hesitates not to consign a lovely and loving woman to the arms of a man who has had his weaknesses, and who does not truly love her, but who has undertaken to be a kind and decorous husband, and we close the book with a certain sense of satisfaction that the young lady is married (the great thing in civilized society—*annulum, quocunque modo, annulum*), and a hope that she will be reasonably happy—the wild oats have been sown, and, as we trust, in stony ground, so that they will never flourish to bear witness against the sower. We, at the end of only half our

book, have done the same thing, and have therefore a second act before us. If the situation with which the new act commences be not all that one could desire, we have one character who is resolved to be all that she should be, and one who believes himself equally resolute to the same good end. What circumstances not immediately in the reader's mind, or what future incidents, outside the life of our principal characters, may do toward disturbing or improving the relations in question, time shall tell and patience shall learn. But we should preach a false moral, when we desire to preach no moral at all, did we allow it to be inferred from what has been said that there are rests in life from which the great account starts afresh, and old items are laid away as not to be again examined. That magnificent theory which the great philosopher, Faraday, expounded on that world-famous night when he revealed his views of the Conservation of Forces may be questioned or accepted for the physical world. In the moral world it is safe to believe that few forces are generated which do not come into active play Sooner or Later.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FIRST GUN.

WITHOUT actually discouraging his wife's visits to the poor cottagers, Ernest Dormer had managed to make it clear to Magdalen that he did not much desire the continuance of such missions, and the feeling that it was so, and another circumstance or two, had made her walks to Trafalgar much less frequent than before her marriage. One morning, however, when Ernest had signified that he must get through some work for Mr. Mangles, Magdalen had paid her round of charitable calls, and was leaving the last place which she had intended to visit—the cottage of the cripple Jull, who had been restored to the abode of his wife—when Mrs. Dormer was respectfully accosted by a stranger.

He was a tolerably well-dressed young man, pale, and evidently nervous, and he flushed to the forehead as he raised his hat for a moment.

"I have the honor of speaking to Mrs. Ernest Dormer?"

"I am Mrs. Dormer," said Magdalen.

She did not recognize the speaker, but had a momentary impression that she had at one time or other heard the voice, which was pitched somewhat higher than the ordinary masculine key.

"Every apology for this intrusion, but I will not detain you a moment," said the stranger. "I only wish to ask a question."

Magdalen looked at him inquiringly.

"May I ask whether you remember paying a visit to a gentleman in Gray's Inn, about two years ago?"

"In Gray's Inn?" repeated Magdalen, mechanically.

"Yes, Mrs. Dormer, a gentleman living in chambers on the top floor of a house in South Square?"

Whatever emotion may have caused the flush which came over the face of the fair young wife, that face became crimson.

The stranger seemed little at ease, and anxious to end the interview, but apparently had to acquit himself of a task.

"I see," he said, hurriedly, "that you do remember it perfectly well, and therefore I need say nothing more, except this. You will wonder why you are asked the question."

"Yes," said Magdalen, hardly knowing what else to say.

"When you have considered over the matter you will probably think that you are interested—deeply interested—in knowing what any one else has to do with your conduct on that occasion."

"My conduct!" repeated Mrs. Dormer.

"The word will do as well as another, if it is understood. You can obtain any information, and it may be well that you should obtain some, by writing to the address upon this card."

Magdalen instinctively took the card he offered.

"At present no one but myself knows that I have sought this interview," said the stranger, in the tone of one who repeats a message. "At present," he added, with emphasis. "And I have now only to renew my apology, and to say good-morning."

He raised his hat again, made a nervous bow, and walked away, at a rapid pace, in the direction of Naybury.

Mrs. Dormer did not look again at him, but had she done so she would have seen that he struck off at the road leading toward the railway station, which he reached as speedily as he could. He departed for London by the next train.

Leaving Magdalen, for the moment, to recover from her surprise, to arrange her thoughts, and to decide what course of action she should take—for some action she had instantly become convinced was necessary—we will follow the fugitive, who arrived in town in the evening, and immediately repaired to a place well known to us.

"Well, Farquhar," said Mr. Dudley, as the younger man entered his friend's shop, "better late than never."

"May be so," said Farquhar, sulkily, and walking, uninvited, into the little parlor.

"Cheeky, is he?" muttered Mr. Dudley, glancing after him. "Then he has done it, or he wouldn't take that liberty."

Dismissing a customer, with the information that the latter talked more than was good for her, that she knew nothing about her case, and had better take the medicine and keep her mouth shut, the observer of human nature, physical and intellectual, followed Mr. Farquhar into the small parlor and closed the door.

"When did you speak to her?" asked Dudley, without prelude.

THE FIRST GUN.

"Who told you I had spoken at all?" replied Mr. Farquhar, who seemed to be in a singularly bad humor.

"You," said his friend. "You appear to be out of sorts, as they say. The journey has been too much for you. That shows you how you have played with your constitution, Farquhar. A fellow at your time of life to be knocked up by a morning's journey in a first-class carriage! I must take you in hand more seriously."

"The journey has had nothing to do with it," said Farquhar, petulantly. "I went to York and came back the same day, and thought nothing of it."

"That was some time ago, young Sir, before we went in so hard for the music of the people. Besides, the filial pleasure of seeing our revered parent sustained us."

"I'll thank you not to chaff me just now, Dudley, because I'm not in the humor for it. It is bad enough to be the tool in this business, without being annoyed and insulted."

"Making all allowance for a person out of health, my friend, I think I may as well recommend you to get off the high ropes, and not give me the trouble of reminding you that this business, as you call it, is your own. But you mention York. Would you like to make another visit to that interesting city? You can easily have an excuse, you know, and a devilish good one; only I doubt whether the jaunt would do your nerves any good."

Mr. Farquhar made no reply, but took out a gaudy cigar-case, and proceeded to light a thin, black, villainous-looking weed, which well deserved that opprobrious name. Mr. Dudley quietly permitted him to kindle it, but as soon as the first poisonous whiff had insulted even the air of that den he rose and coolly took the cigar from the young man's hand. He then pitched the weed, neatly, into the fire-place, and merely said, "No, Sir."

Mr. Farquhar crimsoned with rage, used a profane expression, and defiantly took out another cigar.

"I will not have it, Farquhar," said Mr. Dudley. "Put it up or go."

His voice and look mastered his weak young companion, who, without exactly obeying, refrained from lighting his tobacco, and availed himself of the last word to avoid further contest.

"Yes, you would like me to go, wouldn't you, without hearing what I have done?"

"I know you have been away four days," said Mr. Dudley, accepting the submission with a grim smile, "and I know that you have seen Mrs. Dormer."

"Yes, I have been away four days, and precious pleasant ones they were, of course. If I had not succeeded on the fourth I should have come away, I can tell you."

"You can tell me that, or any other falsehood you please," said Mr. Dudley, coolly. "But you would have been too wise to fail. I suppose you found it difficult to get to speak to the lady, and yet, you being a sort of lady's man, ought to have been able to manage an interview. I have heard you speak rather triumphantly of your cleverness in such matters."

"I don't say that I have been unfortunate in them," said Mr. Farquhar, with one of those execrable smiles which are meant to imply worlds of mystery and success, and which disturb the right foot of the observer, if he be a gentleman, until he recollects that the smile is an acted lie, and that a liar is not worth kicking.

"No, you don't. I never said you did. But you mean that it is one thing to get speech with a lady, and another to manage meetings with milliners and bar-maids. That is true enough, Farquhar. But then you have been in good society, you know. You told me that you met this very lady at Mr. Justice Trailbaston's, and actually spoke to her there."

"So I did, but only a few words. We were not introduced, and there was a great crowd, as there always is at Trailbaston's."

"Is," repeated Dudley, pointedly. "Might one ask how lately you have been there, to know?"

"Not lately."

"Were you ever there more than once, about two years ago?" demanded Dudley, angrily. "You know you never were. What's the good of humbug with me? You might have gone often, I dare say, to Mr. Justice Trailbaston's, and many other good houses, but you chose to drop into Bohemian life and habits; you did not leave cards, and you did not answer notes, and so good people dropped you. For society can do perfectly well without any one person, my friend, let him think himself ever so necessary to the world's peace of mind and happiness."

"You are a good one to preach on such things," retorted Farquhar.

"Perhaps I have seen better society than you will ever know, my boy, even if you don't go altogether to the bad, as seems likely at present. But that's my business. Well, you once had an invitation to the Judge's—somebody got it for you—and you saw Miss Conway, now Mrs. Dormer, and you were not introduced to her, but said a few words—asked her whether she was being attended to, at supper, perhaps, or advised her to sit out of a draught, and she replied courteously, like a lady, that she was being attended to, or that she liked the air—and thus you acquired the right to say that you knew her, and that she was a most charming person, as I dare say you did in many places and to many people—in one place and to one person I know you did. But you had not courage, on the strength of this intimacy, to call on the lady at Naybury, but you lurked about and watched until you could speak to her in the street. That's about the story you had to tell me, is it not?"

To all this, which was said in the most deliberately impertinent way, Mr. Farquhar listened, holding the cigar which he would neither light nor put away, and by this little bit of weakliness exposing his nature, very needlessly, to the friend who had gauged it with fractional accuracy. When Dudley had done, the other said:

"You are devilish fond of hearing your own tongue, doctor."

Mr. Dudley laughed. He was terribly addicted to what Mr. Farquhar called chaff of the most offensive kind, but to do him justice he did not resemble most proficients in the art, who grow angry the moment they are repaid in notes from their own bank.

"One of us must talk," he said, "and as you sit there mum and sulky because I won't have bad tobacco smoked in a room in which I receive ladies I am doing the talking. Come, put up that beast, or send it after its brother, and I'll give you a gem that shall do you good instead of harm. If a statue could smoke those things of yours they would make him nervous."

"I could get nothing better at Naybury," said Farquhar.

"And why couldn't you take advantage of the fresh air, and abstain altogether while you had that to breathe?"

"Easy talking, when one has got a habit."

Mr. Dudley unlocked a box, and while doing so emitted, in an audible mutter, a criticism on fools, which was even more full flavored than Mr. Farquhar's roll of nastiness. But he also produced a small cigar, presented it to his friend, and desired him to light up.

"A lady who doesn't like the smell of that is no lady at all," said Mr. Dudley, "and I don't care whether she's pleased or offended. A bride might smoke it as she went to church and the parson wouldn't find it out."

"It's none so mild, though," said Mr. Farquhar.

"Who said it was? But you don't know much about it; you've spoiled your taste with rubbish. Well, now that I've put the angry boy into good humor, what has he to say? You met Mrs. Dormer somehow."

Mr. Farquhar then detailed the scene which has been described, and repeated his own words pretty faithfully, which was the less a merit that they had been arranged for him by Mr. Dudley, and studied in that very room. Perhaps he depicted himself as having assumed an impassive gravity, in the interview with Magdalen, which was something apart from the fidgety and uncomfortable way in which he had really borne himself, and which would have been a trifle to his credit had it arisen from a feeling that he was doing an unworthy act.

"So far so good," said Mr. Dudley. "You are not certain," he added, after a pause, "that she recognized you. Put your vanity in your pocket, and suppose that it is just possible your fine features made no impression on her at the Trailbastons', or suppose that you have altered. Do you believe she did?"

"I believe she did not."

"Then I am sure of it. That is as well. And she did not tear up the card and fling it in your face, or look round for a policeman?"

"I have told you exactly what happened."

"If you have, and I fully believe it, you have begun your work very well."

"I wish you would not call it my work," said Farquhar.

"But I do, and I wish you distinctly to understand that it is so. I don't understand your shifting and dodging away from that truth, Farquhar. I hate a man who is always wanting to hark back and start fresh. When I've agreed to a thing, I've agreed, and then I take the consequence and proceed. It's like a woman, never to accept a situation and go on logically. I gave you credit for more head."

"I dare say I have head enough for the purpose," replied Farquhar; "but one does not always want to be reminded of—of the dirty side of things."

"Very right, my friend, very right, only no mistakes. Don't suppose that because you have been out of town for a few hours, and changed your sensations a bit, any thing else has been changed. It's not an uncommon blunder. I had a patient, an Irishman, who was a good deal hunted by the chosen people, and when he came back to town after a fortnight in Connemara, though he had not done the least thing in the world toward arranging his affairs, he used to consider that he was personally wronged and outraged when he found that his creditors' minds had not been materially softened by his having been home among his relations. Imagination is a valuable faculty if you can sell it, but not if it sells you."

"I never said that any thing had changed."

"No. But people of a certain kind, especially when they are out of health, are very apt to imagine that because they would like to be let alone they must be. Now we are taking very admirable measures to insure your being let alone in regard to that slander of yours. But until our machinery comes into working, Farquhar, I am bound to tell you that you are in as much danger as ever."

"But you told me on Saturday that you had seen Hobbins."

"I did see Hobbins."

"And that things were to stand over."

"No. In the first place, the action is not in his department of the office, but in that of the junior partner, and will be managed by the man whom you have, you say, quarreled with. All I could get Hobbins to promise was that the apology should be submitted to the lady's friends, and that no steps should be taken without letting me know. This last promise I got from him simply as a personal favor to myself, and because he owed me a day in harvest. But I may get a note at any minute to say that they go on, and I never get a letter without expecting to find that pleasant message in it. I don't say this to alarm you, but because it is idiotic to shut your eyes and fancy no one is aiming at you. There is a note just come in, I can see—suppose that should be Hobbins's, what have you to say?"

Mr. Dudley went out to get the note, which for the best of reasons, as the reader knows, he was quite sure was not from the partner in the sharp firm. Mr. Farquhar looked nervously after him, and, in an irritated manner, cursed him for staying in the shop to speak to a customer.

"No, it is not from Hobbins," said the tormentor, returning, "but the next may be, and as I asked you, suppose he writes to me, as he probably will, 'No terms can be made—your friend must take the consequences'—what should you do next?"

"You say right, Dudley, I am out of health."

"A lawyer don't feel a pulse before exhibiting the stimulant called a writ."

"I know that—hang it, don't joke, Dudley. I meant to say that I am unfit to decide for myself about any thing. You are rude enough to me, but I believe you have a regard for me, and you have a clear head—you might advise me."

"My good fellow, you are asking a medical man to advise a legal man in a matter of law."

"It isn't the law; I could manage that for myself perfectly well."

Here Mr. Dudley, totally unable otherwise to control his lips from a smile, whistled the beginning of a hymn, and thus recovered his gravity. The immediate cause of his disposition to mirth was Farquhar's evincing a disposition to boast his legal knowledge. But for a reason that will have presented itself long ago to legal readers, Mr. Farquhar's ignorance of his calling is much clearer to them than it was to Mr. Dudley, who believed that he was menacjng the other with what, if real, would have been all he represented it to be. In plainer English, Dudley did not know that the supposed client of Mr. Hobbins's firm had no case.

"You mean," said Dudley, "that you want advice as to your conduct. But you keep me so completely in the dark about yourself that I can say nothing useful. You profess abject fear lest your father, at York, should know any thing about your danger. Well, fathers are not, on the whole, such desperately bad fellows as they are made out in stories, and I have even known some who, though they have been cruel enough to kick up a great row because their sons have taken to evil lives, have had the grace to repent and forgive their injured offspring. Is your father likely to take that line?"

"No, never. I don't want to talk of him, but take this as my solemn assurance. He would never forgive me, and he would do something worse than disinherit me. I can not tell you more, but I am in his power, and always shall be until he uses it."

"And then? There is nothing like knowing the worst."

"I should be a beggar, and something else would have happened which must not, and shall not happen, Dudley. I would rather ask you to do a friend's last office, and give me something out of that iron safe you lock so carefully." He added, tearfully, an earnest oath.

"Yes," said Dudley, in a gentler tone than he often used, and with a certain careless but not unsympathetic manner, "I have a true friend or two behind that iron door, but there let them stay till the hour of need. They are friends whose service we ask but once, and it lasts us forever. Perhaps some of us are fools to be so shy of asking what they give so readily. But that is not the way to talk to you. I will not seek to know more of what you hint at. It shows me that our efforts must all be directed to one point, namely, the spiking the enemy's guns before he can begin firing."

"You mean—"

"I mean that we must lose no time in making the good folks at Naybury understand that we have a terrible power, and that we mean to use it."

"Unless they consent to refrain from action."

"We make no terms."

"Yes, if they accept the apology there is an end."

"Is there?" asked Mr. Dudley, significantly.

"What else?"

"A good deal, I imagine," replied Dudley, slowly, and looking steadily at his friend, as if considering whether it were worth while to be more explicit. Apparently he came to a decision, for he suddenly said:

"I am, of course, deeply interested in your business, Farquhar, but I must also have an eye to my own. Luckily it happens that I can combine both. While playing the game that is to save you I can also play one which will serve myself. I think you may as well be content to know that our interests are one, as that will assure you that I shall do all in my power to promote them. All you have to do is to act exactly as I shall suggest. After what you have said about Mr. Farquhar the elder, I imagine that you will be happy to do any thing which shall keep matters from his knowledge."

"That is my one desire. But, of course, I do not want to injure any body, or do any thing that may be hurtful to my professional character hereafter," said poor George Farquhar.

Mr. Dudley could not stand this, and he blazed up.

"Don't sit there talking trash, will you? If you think I am going to work with rose-water you are a greater ass than I supposed you. Take it in the plainest English that I am very likely going to injure somebody very much, though it will be somebody's own fault if I do. And I do not care one cent whether I do or don't, and if there's a smaller coin I don't care that for your future professional character. That's plain speaking, isn't it?"

"Yes, and something else."

"No doubt. But some people require it to make them gripe at a fact, and the fact I want you to gripe at, and hold it hard and fast, is, that this is not a business to be managed with bows and smiles and mock diplomacy, but is a rough and rugged and disreputable affair. Comprehend that, and when you think of kicking against it, think also that it is the only thing between you and this nameless terror at York. If you do that, I shall find you a very useful and docile assistant. But don't let us have any more cant; it makes me savage. No need of assistance for that, you'll say," added Mr. Dudley, who had by this time stormed himself back into good temper.

"No," replied his victim, "but I will forget your language."

"But you'll do nothing of the kind, my friend. You'll remember it, especially when I ask you to pay another visit to Mrs. Dormer."

"You don't mean that?"

"I do, though. I can't say when exactly. If her legal friends press, you will have to go instantly. If they don't—we shall see. In that case we will give her a little time, and see whether she applies to have the prescription you handed to her prepared as recommended. I shall give her very few days, even in that case. You don't understand a tenth part of what that card said to her. If she means

action she will mean it in twenty-four hours. If she does not—why, we must not be harsh with a lady, but we must offer her a little advice, and you, as a lady's man, are just the person to offer it elegantly. So keep yourself in readiness. I take care that your employers are duly informed that you are getting better at the farm-house near Dorking, but are still weak after fever. Here's another cigar for you; go away, and keep close."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CONFIDENCE.

MAGDALEN DORMER'S action was prompter than even Mr. Dudley supposed it would be; for before the emissary of the latter was far on his way back to London, Mrs. Dormer, who had hastened home directly he left her, had called her husband into the library, and had informed him of what had occurred.

"And the fellow went off to the railway station, you say, dear?" had been Ernest's single question.

"He turned up the road that leads to it."

Dormer snatched at the Naybury time-table, but threw it down with an angry exclamation.

"He will have got off by the 12.40. But I can telegraph to have him stopped somewhere," said Ernest. "How was he dressed—any particular mark about him?"

"No," said Magdalen, "I think not. The dress was a common morning one—stay—you know how one's eyes fix upon something when one is annoyed—he had a black stick, ebony, I suppose, with an ivory handle. I wonder how I came to notice it. I am sure I did not know that I had done so."

"A young man?"

"Quite."

"That will do, dear; at least it gives us a very good trail."

And Ernest Dormer went off and telegraphed a peremptory message, addressed to a station-master whom he knew, at a point which Farquhar could not reach for an hour after the words had been flashed along, desiring that the man with the ebony cane might be stopped, and guaranteeing the official from all consequences. He then returned to the house.

"There, dear," he said, "I hope I have caught him. The answer is to be sent here the moment it comes. And now," he added, throwing himself into the large chair, and drawing Magdalen near him, "I have time to ask what it all means."

"And I will tell you," said his wife, "so far as I can; but why this person has come, or what his errand means, you will have to tell me, for I can not understand it in the least."

"He asked you, I think you said, whether you recollected visiting somebody's chambers in Gray's Inn about two years ago. This, I suppose, was a call on Mr. Haslop, after you had been staying with his girls in Wales."

"I never thought of that. But no, dear, I never went to Mr. Haslop's. He invited me two or three times, and said that he had some curiosities to show me; but somehow—I forget—the visit was put off, and I never made it."

"Well, but have you other legal acquaintances in that quarter, dear?"

"I had one, and it must be to a visit to him that this strange message refers."

"May I know?" he said, smiling.

"May *you* know! I have often been going to tell you the story, but to think about it always gives me a nervous night, and I have put it aside for pleasanter things."

"If it will do that now," said Ernest, tenderly, "put it aside again, and only let me know enough to be able to deal with this gentleman when I hear that he is trapped. You did make a call in Gray's Inn about the time he mentioned."

"Yes, and under very curious circumstances."

"Never mind them now. You called on—"

"Mr. Percy Vaughan."

"I seem to know the name—not the man."

"He was a solicitor—a young man—and I made his acquaintance when I was staying with the Haslops. He rescued me from a great peril; it is this, Ernest, which I have been going to tell you about."

"Not now, love. Much as I should like to hear it I would rather wait. It is enough that you were delivered. But I hope to have a chance of thanking him myself."

"I think that you never will. Mr. Haslop told me that Mr. Vaughan had left the country, I believe for Australia, and would never return."

"An odd phrase that last. It makes one think that he had done something worse than what he did for you."

"If I say that I fear it was so I should be speaking too strongly; but something in Mr. Haslop's manner or look made me believe that Mr. Vaughan had not gone away entirely by his own will."

"Ah!" said Dormer, very gravely. "I am sorry to know that; and I am sorry that you should have been beholden to that kind of man. I begin to see this business now. He has come back, and being, I suppose, in a bad way, sends to remind you of the service, that you may show your gratitude. He may be driven to that sort of thing, but the way he adopts is very bad. As he knows that you are here, and are my wife, he should have addressed you—or rather myself—in a direct manner. Still, if he has served you, and is in distress, we must see what is to be done. I wish I had not telegraphed."

"Dearest Ernest, if I set my opinion up against yours it is only because I know more of Mr. Vaughan than you can. I am as sure as I can be of any thing that this message has nothing to do with him."

"No? What do you make of it yourself, then? But before we decide that it is not from Vaughan, don't be vexed if I ask you to remember that

a man may be a hero at one minute, and something very unheroic at another. You were very young, and what he did for you may have invested him with a character he did not deserve; you are very quick-witted, too, and I dare say you got the right notion from Mr. Haslop."

"Indeed I am not quick-witted, dear, and you are always finding merits in me that I do not possess. But I feel that I am right in this, though I can not tell you why."

"Papa knows all about the service, whatever it was?" said Ernest.

"Mamma does. But she never would mention it to him, for you know his intense love for me, and she feared the effect that the story would have on him."

"She will tell me?"

"Certainly. No, nobody shall tell you but myself. It is childish to be nervous about a thing that is long past and gone; besides, I am much braver and stronger now than I ever was. I insist on speaking, Sir."

We may hope that the interview between Mr. Haslop and Percy Vaughan in the chambers of the former has been remembered. A speech then made by Mr. Haslop will save the necessity of following Magdalen's narration.

"*You showed yourself a brave man when, single-handed, and with no weapon but a stake snatched from the hedge, you beat off the three miners and rescued Miss Conway.*"

Magdalen told the tale in a way which showed that the terror of that ten minutes would long abide with her, and before she had finished Ernest Dormer's arm was around her, and he was asking her to desist. But she went on to the end.

"A noble fellow—a glorious fellow!" said Dormer, with a man's honest admiration for manliness. "I hate him, because he was there to do it, and I was not. But I don't care what he has done since—nothing worse, I dare say, than what heaps of men of business, as they are called, do every day, and don't get found out. But if it were murder I would help him in his need. Where is the card, dearest?"

"I gave it you, I thought," said Magdalen.

"Then you insist on believing, dear, that this message is from Mr. Vaughan?"

"It seems so very much more likely than any thing else. You have received a great service from a man in Gray's Inn. You have called upon him there. You have heard that he has got into difficulties. And now you are reminded of the place. What other conclusion can all this point at? What, indeed, makes you doubt?"

"Only a strong moral conviction that Mr. Vaughan would never ask a reward for any thing he had done for me."

"I see," said Ernest, grimly. "Ha! ha!"

The exclamation and the subsequent laugh were so demonstrative that they deceived Magdalen, who said, timidly,

"Ernest!"

"My darling. Surely I did not startle you. I had my cue for a tremendous explosion of jealousy. You informed me that this Mr. Vaughan proposed to himself a very high reward indeed for protecting you against those ruffians. But, great as the service was, you thought the price demanded was too high."

"Yes, and I am here," said Magdalen, blushing like a girl.

"Here," said Ernest, pressing her to his side.

After a pause, however, he said:

"You must not think me pertinacious in still adhering to my belief, or at least in not quite surrendering it. I am full of admiration for Vaughan's bravery; and it is not I, at all events, who should think ill of him for admiring Miss Conway. But time, misfortune, and being hustled about an unpleasant world will often turn a good fellow into a bad one. I would rather not think that they had done this in Vaughan's case. I only say that you must not be confident that what you tell me has been strong enough to keep him from making this application. Be it as it may, we must know all about it. Did I put the card into my pocket? Stop, here it is."

The card was a written one, and merely bore the words:

"Mr. George Farquhar, 17 Lancaster Street, Holborn."

"I know Holborn pretty well," said Ernest Dormer. "Lancaster Street—let's think. Yes, I think I know—one of those squalid kind of streets which people who live in light and air, and with plenty of elbow room, think dismal and dreary, but in which money is made and life is enjoyed by those who are acclimatized. It is just the sort of place in which a hard-up man would lurk—a man, I mean, who is needy, and does not wish to be seen until better times come."

"I suppose there are great numbers of such poor creatures hiding and pining in London," said Magdalen, "and better times never come to many of them."

"If there is any thing in a man," said Dormer, "and he has health, he will fight out of any trouble. If there is not, he is a mistake."

"That is a hard doctrine, dearest. It may be wise in a worldly point of view. But I think it is the mistakes that ought to be helped."

"We must read political economy together, dear; meantime we will violate all rules and help this mistake if he turns out to be the person I suppose."

"And if not?"

"Then the affair is somewhat mysterious; but we will exhaust one case before we take up another. And now, dear, you will rest quietly here while I see whether any answer to my telegram has come."

He led her to the sofa, and, with a kiss, left her.

"That is no message from Percy Vaughan," said Magdalen to herself. "Ernest is full of the world's wisdom, and knows the world's ways, but this time he is wrong, and it is natural that he should be. I can bring no proof that will satisfy his mind. I have only my own convic-

tion. But that is unshaken. I am sorry, too, that Percy Vaughan should be suspected of meanness—that, at least, was no part of his nature. I should like him to be cleared of that suspicion, and Ernest will clear him if he follows up the inquiry. But Ernest is right in saying that if Percy Vaughan has no share in the business it is a mystery. I am glad I have told him every thing. I am very glad that I have told him every thing. Very glad."

The last words were murmured—rather than spoken—at intervals, and the young wife lapsed into a quiet slumber

"I am so glad you have slept, darling," said her husband, as she opened her eyes, and smilingly declared that she had dozed for five minutes only.

"Nay, I have been reading by your side for half an hour," he said, "and I was at least an hour at the railway station."

"Why did you not wake me?"

"I knew better. Besides, I had nothing to tell. The bird has escaped. No person of the kind has been through. But I traced him into the carriage here. Our station-master noticed him particularly—noticed the stick, and, moreover, answered his inquiry about the Brandington junction. That may explain it. I was hasty in assuming that because he was a Londoner he would run straight home, and if he has gone on he has run round by Brandington."

This guess was right. Mr. Farquhar was in a very nervous state, and had summoned up an idea that he might be followed by some avenging friend of Magdalen. So he had taken a very circuitous route, leaving the Naybury train, and waiting for another. For once, a terror had saved him some unpleasantness.

"I am glad he has got away," exclaimed Ernest, "and I have sent another message repealing my first edict in case he should turn up. We must now consider what is to be done—that is, I will consider it, and you shall be told all about it, for I will not have my Magdalen disturbed. What does she say to my running up to town, and looking into the business?"

"That you are to do exactly as you please. Only—"

"Only?"

"No, only nothing. I will not be nervous at being left alone."

"But I will make only a day's work of it. I will be back the same night."

"No, dear. I shall have to learn to be without you often, and it would be childish to expect you always to be here. I have told you so before. But you must write to me, Sir. I won't be neglected and forgotten."

Ernest's reply would have been, no doubt, a proper one, but there was a gentle knock at the door.

"May mamma come in?"

"How dare you ask?" said Ernest, opening the door.

"Well, you know I never disturb you when you are writing, but I heard you say that you had finished all you meant to do to-day, and I wanted to know how Magdalen was—she complained of headache."

"That was the day before yesterday, mamma. I am quite well now, and I have had a long sleep, and that is not at all what you have come about. I can see it in your eyes."

Yes, it was quite clear that dear Mrs. Conway had got something to say, and something that it did not displease her to have to say. She seated herself with a certain complacency.

"Mrs. Conway," said Ernest, amused, "you have heard something."

"One is always hearing something or other," said Mrs. Conway. "It is impossible to go about the world with one's ears shut."

And then the dear old lady was silent again. But they would not speak, and so she began to ask Magdalen questions about what she had taken for lunch, and whether she thought it too hot for the garden, and other matters evidently interposed for no purpose but to increase, by delay, a satisfaction which already beamed out at her eyes.

"Magdalen, I forbid you to talk much," said Ernest, looking laughingly at his mother-in-law. "Mrs. Conway, I should like to fetch Mr. Conway."

"I am sure I have no objection," said Mary Conway. It was exactly what she wanted. She had earned a little triumph, and she was particularly desirous that it should pass before the eyes of her husband.

Dormer went away for his father-in-law. The moment his back was turned Mrs. Conway's lips were on Magdalen's forehead.

"I am not malicious, you know that, darling, but I like to be seen in the right now and then. Mr. Grafton—"

But here the gentlemen entered.

"Very quick indeed, Ernest. I understand that. Papa was waiting in the next room to be called in. Of course he was. Men have no curiosity. He does not care in the least to know what I am going to say; not in the least."

"My dear Mary, these *staccato* passages do you credit. Children, your mother has a revelation. I told you, Ernest, that there was great doubt what form of sweetmeat the child had left in the pew at Saxbury, and that the public were divided on the question whether it was liquorice or almond rock. We are not without hopes that we approximate a solution of the problem, and you must not be startled at the word horehound."

"Hold your tongue, papa, or I will tell you nothing. Now you all know my opinion about the Graftons, don't you?"

"We have had reasonable opportunities of knowing it, at all events, my dear," said her husband.

"And I have always been scolded for being uncharitable; haven't I?"

"*Quis vituperavit?*" said Mr. Conway to Mr. Dormer.

"Well, there has been such a scene at the

Rectory. Magdalen, dear, you have been your rounds this morning. Did you see that Mrs. Faunt?"

"No, mamma. I never called there when I could help it—only that she might not feel neglected. To-day, I remember, her door was shut."

"Yes, it was. She was on an errand of mischief."

"How do you know, my dear?" asked Mr. Conway, in an under-voice.

"Never mind about that. I do know it Ernest, that poor girl who was thought to have told falsehoods about hearing the gold given to that woman in the church is proved to have told the truth, and nothing else—proved out of the woman's own mouth."

"Well," said Mr. Conway, "suppose the younger Mr. Grafton did relieve the woman, just as Magdalen did, only that he did it on a larger scale, what does this show against a clergyman, whose business it is to succor the distressed?"

"Succor the fiddle-stick! Clergymen are not in the habit of being so dreadfully liberal. They will preach sermons for the poor, and beg to any extent, but they are in no hurry with their own money. Besides, we don't relieve the poor in a dark church when every body else has gone away."

"My dear, your excellent memory does not serve you. We are expressly told to let such things be done secretly."

"Ah, well, you are ready enough to say that the translation is not correct. I am quite certain that secretly is not the right translation of a dark church after service; but that is neither here nor there. That woman has been to the Rectory, has insisted on seeing Mr. Grafton and Edward, and after such a stormy talk as I suppose was never heard in that house before, has declared that the Rev. Edward Grafton is in her debt, and that unless he pays at once she will proclaim what she has done for him; and then he will no longer be able to remain in this neighborhood, or in the church itself for that matter."

"By Jove!" remarked Ernest Dormer.

"I think, my dear," said Mr Conway, rather more gravely than he usually addressed his wife, "that whether this story be true or—disputable—we had better confine our knowledge of it within these four walls."

"Why, of course," said Mrs. Conway, "you don't think that I would repeat it, do you? But it shows you that I was not so very far wrong, after all, in my estimate of the Graftons."

"We won't discuss that until we know a little more," said Mr. Conway. "It is just possible that the whole story may be false, and quite possible that this wretched woman may be bringing a false accusation. Let us wait and hear more before we come even to a mental decision."

"Events run in couples, love," whispered Ernest to Magdalen.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE EDITOR'S CHAMBERS.

THE next day Ernest Dormer went up to London.

He had some curiosity to discover the meaning of the message that had been given to his wife, though it did not occur to him to attach much importance to the matter. He was at a time of life when men of sense cease to see mysteries in every thing which they do not immediately comprehend, and his present belief was that the person who had rendered Magdalen a service, and had fallen into difficulties, was now desirous to avail himself of her grateful recollection of his courage. Ernest was even disposed to give Mr. Vaughan some credit for making his appeal in a way which if eccentric was considerate, as it spared the necessity for reference to the past, and left the recompense to Magdalen's generosity. Dormer therefore designed to ascertain that the case was as he supposed, and then to act as liberally as was possible. No shade of displeasure crossed his mind that he had not previously been made acquainted with the incident in his wife's life, and he instinctively accepted the explanation which she offered.

But this was not his only reason for wishing to come to town. He had become a little restless, not to say weary, under the small and monotonous boredom of the country town, and though he had resolved to make the best of the situation, he found it difficult to resist a wish to refresh himself with a brief recurrence to the habits and topics of a larger world. The state of Magdalen's health just now compelled her to give him less of her companionship than heretofore, and though the other members of the household were very pleasant persons, and untiring in their efforts to make him happy, Ernest Dormer's old life had made a certain variety of social intercourse necessary to him, and he is not to be judged too harshly for not at once becoming acclimatized.

Thirdly—well, he wanted to see Walter Latrobe. Upon the fitness of this wish we have nothing to say.

So he went up, with Magdalen's peremptory commands to stay as long as he pleased, but to write to her frequently. And for the first time since her marriage she was alone with her thoughts and hopes.

He arrived late, took a favorite old lodging not far from the Octagon Club, and intended to make that establishment his head-quarters.

The following morning he went to Lancaster Street, Holborn, to inquire after Mr. Farquhar. The address, it is needless to say, was that of Mr. Dudley. Ernest Dormer knocked at the private door, and heard a man's voice giving instructions to the servant. He was informed that Mr. Farquhar occupied the first-floor, but that he was out of town, and his return was uncertain. Would he please to leave his name?

This was about the answer which Dormer expected to receive. He had had some expe-

rience in the ways of gentlemen in difficulties. He therefore left a message calculated to assure Mr. Farquhar, or whomsoever it might concern, that the visit was not one of the character so obnoxious to the impecunious. He left his card and compliments, and a request that Mr. Farquhar would make his own appointment, the sooner the better; and he added, with a smile to the servant, that he was sure Mr. Farquhar would like to know who had called. The maiden had not the least hesitation in assuring the vigilant Mr. Dudley that Mr. Dormer was quite a gentleman.

"So much the better," said Mr. Dudley, with a grunt, as he shut the door of communication. "Only I must shave, and furbish up my manners. I think I'll have my hair cut."

While Mr. Dudley carried out these laudable intentions, or at least two of them, for he postponed the second until he had soundly abused an unoffending barber for not being in his shop at the moment it pleased his unwonted customer to come in, Ernest Dormer went on to Lincoln's Inn Fields to call on Mr. Mangles, his friend and editor.

Mr. Mangles was dressing, but his prime minister, Mr. Pruth, was there, in his customary black, overhauling contributions and selecting topics from newspapers, a process he performed with a large pair of scissors. The two men liked each other, and shook hands with much heartiness.

"The paper has been capital lately, Pruth, if the opinion of a *paganus* be of any value."

"Very glad to hear you say so, for the governor has left it a good deal more to me than I wished. Have you brought us any thing for this week?"

One of the editorial sort would ask you this if you had come in to tell him that your house was on fire, or that you had just taken poison.

"I have brought you myself, as Moses says, but no green spectacles this time. Is that the first thing to say to a man when he arrives after his marriage? Where are your manners, Pruth, and your congratulations?" said Dormer, laughing.

"Yes, that is true," said Mr. Pruth; "but I believe that I have forgotten how to be polite, if I ever knew."

Yet he contented himself with this piece of autobiography, and did not repair the omission. It was Pruth, and therefore Dormer took no notice of this at the moment.

"Will Mangles be long, think you?" he said.

"I suppose not. I don't know. He is going to a flower-show with some ladies, I believe."

"How he has become demoralized! Mangles at a flower-show! Any thing up, Pruth?" said Ernest, laughing again. "Is my example —eh?"

"Oh, I don't know. I never take those things for granted until they come into my column of marriages, and not always then. We were nearly hoaxed last week, only a slip betrayed the forgery—the fellow made the date of a wedding the 13th, and I happened to remember that this was a Friday, and I suppose you couldn't get a girl of a certain station to the altar on a Friday if the penalty for her not going were to be her never getting there at all."

"*Vigilat in œde Lar*, as ever, Pruth."

"You are not to suppose I don't know that you are quoting Latin," said Mr. Pruth, "when I tell you that reminds me to ask you, with all humility, not to quote Greek quite so often in your articles. There's nobody on the staff who can be trusted with the corrections."

"Don't you be a humbug, Pruth," said Ernest Dormer, good-humoredly. "I happen to know that you are a capital Greek scholar yourself, and that in early days you cut up Lord Brougham's translation from Demosthenes."

"Ages ago. I couldn't do it now, and unless I can turn to a quotation I am unhappy about it all the week."

"Well, I will mind what you say, though you have given me any thing but your real reason for the advice. Who wrote that article last week about the English love for racing?"

"It was a very good article, wasn't it?"

"My dear fellow, don't I know better than to find fault with any article in a paper you conduct? Every thing is perfect, or at least you swear it is, and quite right too. I only wanted to know whether that was by Mark Derwent."

"But what was the matter with the article?" persisted Mr. Pruth.

"Again I tell you, nothing. Only if it was Derwent's I wonder he did not bring in a story I told him about crabs."

"Tell me. I am very fond of crabs."

"Not as instruments of gambling, I hope."

"Gambling! Oh, throwing crabs, you mean."

"A good shot, and yet a miss, Pruth. What business have you to know any thing about dice? No, Sir, the story was this. A friend of mine, a great contractor, who was making a harbor somewhere, fancied that he did not get work enough out of the men who went down in the diving-bell. He felt that they wasted time, but he could not imagine how. So one day when they were at dinner he went into the bell. And there he found seven large crabs, and on the back of each was chalked the name of a favorite for the Derby. The men had crab-races at the bottom of the sea. Derwent knew this story, and might have put it in."

"He might, and did, and Mangles cut it out, because he said that it was too good not to have been in print before. I don't believe it has."

"Nor I, but if it had, what matter? Every body hasn't read every thing. What a time Mangles is over his beautification. I begin to fear there must be something in what I suggested."

"Why do you say fear," asked Pruth, seriously; "yourself a newly-married man?"

"Because Mangles ought not to marry. Editors and soldiers ought to be forbidden marriage."

Pruth looked at him earnestly for a moment, but made no answer, and Mr. Mangles entered,

dressed as a gentleman should be dressed when he makes ladies responsible for the appearance of their companion, an aphorism which it is humbly supposed will be acceptable to sundry. And Mangles was very glad to see his friend.

"Mrs. Dormer is in town with you, of course," said the editor. "Does she want hatfuls of stalls, concert tickets, exhibition cards, private boxes? Speak, I am her slave."

"Thanks. But my wife has not come up with me this time. I make a hurried visit, on some business, and run home."

Mr. Pruth made no sign, but he was glad to hear Ernest use the words wife and home.

"Very well, I won't say so much the better; but you know what King Somebody said to the two men. 'Married?' 'Yes, your majesty.' 'Happy man! And you?' 'No, your majesty.' 'Lucky dog!' I don't mean that, of course, but you must come about with me, and see the world, after your rustic exile. Do you know Lady Syleham?"

"Just."

"You shall know her better. I'm going to the Botanic Gardens with her and her daughter, and I'll take you, and we'll all dine at Greenwich. They'll come if I ask them."

"If *you* ask them. I see."

"No, you don't. It's not that. But will you come? Say yes on the spot, like a good fellow."

"I can't go to the flowers, but I'll come on to Greenwich, if you'll have me. I have got some business that will keep me in this part of the town."

"Throw it over—business will keep and flowers won't."

"No."

"Your no means no," said Mangles, "as I am aware, of old. But I hope the business is nothing disagreeable—nothing that will make you dull at dinner. If it will, go and dine at the Octagon, and bore some of those fellows. If it won't, come and help me to amuse Lady Syleham and the gracious Isabella."

"I will dine with you, I tell you, and be glad."

"You are not half a bad fellow. Only this—and you'll know in a moment whether it can be or not. I should be particularly rejoiced if you could come to the Botanic—"

"To take off Lady Syleham while you amuse the young lady. I know," interpolated Ernest Dormer.

"Not at all, as you shall see. Now if your business could stand over—Pruth could write a letter and say that you had got the measles, or something—"

"I never make mysteries," said Dormer, "and I will just tell you what the business is. Somebody who did my wife a service in other days has been reminding her of it, because, as I suppose, he is up a tree, and I have just left him word to let me see him."

"But you have no appointment."

"No, because he is out of the way. But I dare say I shall have one in an hour or two. I fancy he is not far off. He used to be in Gray's Inn, and may be there now."

"In Gray's Inn," said Mr. Mangles, with a curious emphasis, which both men remarked, but only one understood.

"Yes," said Ernest, with some surprise. "Is there any thing wonderful in a man's living there?"

"I did not mean that there was any thing wonderful," said Mangles, slowly, for he was doing what the ring calls sparring for wind. "Many people live there—lawyers, that is to say. Yes. Many people live there, lawyers."

"By Jove!" said Ernest, laughing, "these Delphics of yours puzzle me."

"Yes," said Mangles again. He was—Pruth knew it—suddenly called to make up his mind on a delicate matter, and he was doing it.

"I will write any reasonable excuse for you with pleasure, you know," said Mr. Pruth, to give his chief time. "We can have it sent round to the address, wherever it is, and then you will be at liberty for the day."

"The address is 17 Lancaster Street, Holborn," said Ernest Dormer, "but—"

He stopped, for Mr. Pruth, less a man of the world than Mangles, changed color at the mention of Dudley's residence.

"What the devil does this all mean?" said Ernest Dormer. "Mangles talks nonsense and Pruth turns white, and all because—"

"Because," said Mangles, rising, and laying his hand on his friend's shoulder, "because Mangles and Pruth are your sincere friends, and you have startled them."

He had entirely dropped the gay manner with which he had been holding his part in the conversation, and he spoke with unusual earnestness.

"I have startled you?"

"Yes," said Mangles. "But that is over, and I see my way. Dormer, I shall pain you, I may offend you, but I risk both the certainty and the chance rather than let you go unwarned into a false position."

"I have known you a good many years, Mangles."

"Yes, and that means, I hope, that you may be pained but will not be offended."

"Of course it does. But tell me what you mean," said Dormer, impatiently.

"I would take you into another room, but, to be frank with you, Pruth and I have few secrets."

"I would rather go away," said Mr. Pruth, speaking with the utmost sincerity.

"But I request you to stay," said his chief. "I mean," he said, as if to do away with the idea of authority (though Pruth rather liked discipline), "I mean that your cool head may be of service."

"As you please."

"Then, Dormer, let me ask you a question."

"Any thing, so that it is quick," said Ernest, sharply.

"You said you supposed that this person who is reminding Mrs. Dormer of other days is in difficulties. Do you know who he is?"

"I believe I do. He calls himself Farquhar. But what do you know about it, and how does it interest you?"

"A moment. May I ask—you are sure I should not venture to ask but for a reason—has Mrs. Dormer told you that the applicant is the person you suppose?"

"No. She does not think so. Now you have not answered me."

"Bear with me another instant, and you shall hear all. Do you know the nature of the service he is supposed to have rendered?"

"Yes. He saved her honor, perhaps her life."

"From whom?"

"From some ruffians in Wales."

"Dormer, believe me when I say that this is simply the most painful moment of my whole life. I would have given all I have to evade it. But, as a friend and a gentleman, I am bound, having certain convictions, to prevent your being practiced upon."

"Practiced upon! By whom?" said Ernest, angrily.

"At present I have no right to say more than by this applicant to Mrs. Dormer. I am certain he is a scoundrel. The house to which you have been is the house of a doctor, as he calls himself, of the lowest kind, and whose history has not quite kept out of the police sheets, though he has escaped. Any thing in which he is mixed is rascality. There is a plot to extort money. Is not that your belief, Pruth?"

"Yes."

"You are not telling me all you know, or believe you know," said Ernest Dormer, with composure. "The detection of a mere trick to extort money does not account for your hesitation and Pruth's agitation. And you have talked of pain and offense. There is cause for either? I have something else to hear."

"Yes," said Mangles, "and you should never have heard it from me, but that you will infallibly learn it in five minutes from that man or some of his accomplices. But first let me say that I hear this moment, and for the first time, of the story of the rescue in Wales. I am bound to say that I believe no such rescue ever took place."

Ernest Dormer sprang to his feet, but he suppressed his anger.

"Do you tell me that you believe my wife has lied to me?"

"No," said Mangles, with apparent indignation at the question. "But I believe that she was deceived. I can only guess at the means by which the trick was played, for I have had no time to think over it, but I would swear that it is false that any real service was done by a tool of—of—his infernal name, Pruth?"

"Dudley?"

"That was the name I read," said Ernest. "So far you are safe. But what gives you the right to connect my wife's name with that of any person in the world—any scoundrel, I mean? Tell me, in God's name, what it is that you are keeping back. You dare not say that my wife—Bah," he added, scornfully, as the image of Magdalen arose before him, "I am mad to ask the question. Say what you have to say, Mangles. I am not afraid of it."

And in his earnest trust in the beautiful woman whom he had left in her home, Ernest smiled proudly.

And Mangles winced under the smile, not because it was one of triumph, but because he had to say that which might banish such smiles for the future.

"You will see this Dudley, or Farquhar, or whatever he may call himself, Dormer," said Mangles, speaking in a subdued voice, but as one who now meant to go on to the end; "and he will tell you that for which you will do well to be ready with an answer. He will tell you that Mrs. Dormer, when Miss Conway, and before you knew her, had acquaintance with a young gentleman who lived in South Square, Gray's Inn, and used to visit him in his chambers."

"Is this all?" said Ernest Dormer, calmly.

"It is all that I need put words to," said Mangles; "but I doubt not that Dudley will have something more to say in order to explain his application."

"How, Mangles, did you hear that Miss Conway visited Gray's Inn?"

"From a member of the Octagon Club."

"His name?" asked Ernest Dormer, quickly.

"I will give it you, for you have a right to it. But I will ask you not to press that right until you have brought the Dudley business to an end. If the knowledge should be useful sooner I will give it you."

"A few hours is all you are asking," said Ernest. "Do you think I will let this matter rest for a moment?"

"I trust that you may be able to prove it the slander which I doubt not it is," said Mangles. "But I warn you that there will be an attempt to prove the visits."

"It will not be needed."

"What do you say?"

"My wife did pay one visit to a young gentleman who lived in the place mentioned. He was known to Mr. Haslop, the conveyancer, who lent him money that enabled him to leave for Australia."

Thenceforth Mangles spoke with great caution, and as one who weighed each word.

"Mrs. Dormer having informed you of the circumstances—may I ask when?—"

"No matter," said Dormer, haughtily.

"No," said Mangles, instantly drawing a conclusion of his own. "It is enough that you are informed, because you will be ready with your answer. Does she know—and I am ashamed to mention a lady's name so often—does Mrs. Dormer know why the gentleman had to leave England?"

"She was told that he had gone wrong in some way, but not how."

"And you do not know?"

"Nor care, I think, Mangles."

"Yes, you may as well be aware that it was on account of an attempt to obtain money upon forged title-deeds."

"And how was the forgery detected?"

"By Haslop, under whose hands they came for examination into the title."

"And then," said Ernest Dormer, "Haslop having discovered the villainy, gives the culprit a large sum of money to go away from England. Why should he do that?"

"I do not know."

"But I do," said Ernest, triumphantly. "And now, my dear Mangles, one word to yourself. You heard this story about my wife—you heard it at the Octagon. Was it before or after my marriage?"

Pruth looked at his chief to see in his face what he was going to say. Mangles hesitated, and of course Dormer had his answer. If the other for a moment meditated an untruthful reply he felt that it would be useless, for Ernest Dormer would have learned at the club that his marriage had been discussed long before it occurred.

"Before," said Mangles.

"Just so," said Ernest Dormer. "If I were twenty, I should leave you with an insulting word, and never meet you again. Being a good deal more, I give you the credit of having felt most kindly toward me, and if you abstained from telling me what I ought to have known, it was because you knew that I was making a good match, which perhaps you thought I could not afford to break off. I shall hear an echo of such a speech in the smoke-room at the club."

"Not an echo of any speech of mine, Ernest. I call upon Pruth to bear witness to what I thought and said."

"Had the story got into Mr. Pruth's world too?" asked Dormer, with a certain haughtiness.

"No," said Mr. Pruth, who felt the taunt, but who was a truly good man, and instantly forgave what he saw was but a proof that Dormer had been wounded. "My poor little world does not care for any stories."

"And I beg your pardon, Pruth," said Ernest Dormer, promptly.

"There is no need," said the good Pruth. "I am to say, being asked, that Mr. Mangles expressed much annoyance that the tale in question should be spread, and hesitated as to acquainting you with it. He paid me the compliment of consulting me upon a subject on which my opinion could be of no value."

"And you counseled him to be silent?"

"No," exclaimed Mangles, promptly; "let me do him the justice which I know he won't do himself. He refused to advise me at all, but he said something which did him honor. If I were truly what he understood by the word friend, I should never rest until I knew the truth, and could either counsel you to break off the marriage, or with a good conscience be your best man."

"That is what I felt Pruth would say. I mean no reproach to you, Mangles, for not taking his counsel. No man has a right to demand such work from another, as times go."

"That is not generous, Dormer, recollecting as you ought to recollect that I am not one of those who do a friend's work negligently."

"You are right. I have known you spare neither time, labor, nor money when you had undertaken a business."

And there Ernest Dormer stopped, but Mangles at once felt what the other omitted to say. So did Pruth.

"It appears to me," said Pruth, "that two men who sincerely like one another are going to drift into coldness for want of a little plain speech between them. I am a plain speaker, and I will take the liberty of saying that Mr. Dormer is entirely wrong in imputing any lukewarmness, any want of earnest friendship, to Mr. Mangles. The question of interference occupied him very deeply, and if he decided not to interfere it was for a reason which ought to satisfy Mr. Dormer."

"I am satisfied," said Ernest, quietly; "and it is due to you both that when I have cleared up this question I should let you know what I have done. Mangles, you will then give me the name you owe me?"

"Assuredly."

"Then good-morning to both."

He went away without another word.

"It seems to me," said Mangles, after a pause, "that with the very best intentions we have managed this matter about as badly as possible."

"It is one of those matters which will manage themselves," said Pruth, "and I do not know that we could have done better. I saw, of course, what your reticence meant."

"Of course. But there will be little reticence where he is going. However, if the affair is hushed up, he will never be able to feel that his wife's character was impugned here. But our friendship is over, that is certain."

"I can not say. I never think that I quite understand the character of Ernest Dormer."

"That has been said before. It will be shown now, I imagine. I wish I had not got to go to this flower-show."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

RETURN TO THE CLUB.

Ernest Dormer called at the club to ascertain whether any letter had been sent by Farquhar, but found none. He was in no mood to go into the house and receive congratulations. Perhaps he might be greeted by the very man whom he intended to call to account, and might have to accept as courtesy what was said in irony. He had every reason, save one, for

keeping away from his friends, but that one reason, like Aaron's serpent, swallowed up all the others, and that was his sense of what he owed to his wife. The more because there had been whispers and doubts was he bound to show himself the proud and confiding husband. And having taken his resolve, he went into the morning-room, where a dozen men were reading the papers, or writing notes, and not one who looked up at his entrance would have supposed that the new-comer had just gone through a disturbing interview.

Men rose and came up to Ernest, and shook his hand warmly. He had been much liked in the club. It is not the habit of club-men, as a rule, to be very demonstrative, but a good many hearty words of condensed congratulation were said to him, and he received them with perhaps a little more warmth of manner than was usual with him.

"Come to town for long, old fellow?" said good-natured Jemmy Rydon.

"No," said Ernest, smiling, and giving the word emphatically, as if repudiating the idea. "For I have come up alone."

"Ah, that sounds well," said Rydon. "We enjoy the domesticities, eh? That's right. A virtuous home is the only thing to make a man happy."

"And I am perfectly happy, Jemmy," said Ernest, "and I know that you will be glad to hear it."

"I am," said Doddy Dalston, who stood near and heard. "How Rydon should know what he has just stated is neither here nor there."

"Rydon knows two or three things," said that gentleman. "Among them is the fact that he will never sit down to whist with Mr. Dalston any more. I lost seven pounds yesterday, Dormer, all through that fellow's deliberately atrocious play."

"I have nearly forgotten how we handicapped the whist-men here," said Ernest, "but I fancied that Dalston knew something about it."

"Play with him as your partner to-night then, and you'll be disabused of that error."

"No, you play too high for a family man," said Dormer.

"Hear him!" said Tom Alford, coming up. "However, we are quite prepared to believe that you are in Paradise. We have had Sam Mangles's report about Naybury and all that is therein."

"Yes, he was kind enough to leave town at a busy time and come to the wedding," said Ernest. "And I am glad that he gave a good account of us all, for we deserve it, I can tell you. Here's Charley Launceston, with his eternal *Charivari*—why, Charley, you had that in your hand when I saw you last. Have you been studying it ever since? Well, Daimes, how are politics? I have had leisure for reading them lately, and I shall be happy to discuss reform with you, and we'll have Marsden—how are you, Marsden?—to keep us dull and decorous. Any body seen Walter Latrobe lately?"

He talked with an effort, but he was determined to talk.

Latrobe was in town, somebody said, but he had not been to the club much, and had not given very satisfactory explanations as to what he meant by staying away.

"Some of us fancy that he has set up a boarding-school for children," said Jemmy Rydon.

"I wouldn't trust him with one of mine, if I had any," said Dalston. "It would die of chocolate-creams, or something, in a month. Awful kind fellow to kids is Walter."

"It is not kindness to overfeed them with sweets," said Dormer, with extreme gravity.

"Hear, hear!" broke out from several men.

"There spoke the family man, if you like," said Tom Alford. "Now you may perceive how thoroughly he has thrown himself into domestic life, and is learning the hearth-rug religion."

"I am a country gentleman," said Ernest Dormer, "and I trust long to live honored and happy in that proud, if prosaic, state of life. And now," he thought, "I have done enough in the way of demonstration."

Henry Wigram came in.

He saw Ernest immediately on opening the door, and for a moment thought of affecting not to have noticed him and of retreating, but Dormer's eye caught his, and the next instant Wigram's hand was in his friend's. Henry's tone was always melancholy, but he exerted himself to greet Dormer without any very undue amount of pathos.

"We hardly hoped to see you among us so soon," said Wigram.

"I shall not stay long, so if any gentleman wishes to get up another banquet in my honor he must be prompt."

"Hang it, we might have a house-dinner," said Rydon, who was always ready to dine, or to give a dinner, or to join in a dinner, or to talk about a dinner. Cookery was the only one of the fine arts which held a high place in Mr. Rydon's esteem, and he had a favorite plan for instituting a Royal Academy for the Encouragement of Cooks, which scheme, but for his utter inability to arrange three written sentences in connection, he would have given to the world.

"Will you be in a house-dinner, Horace Clyde?" said Wigram, with a faint wink at Dormer.

"When, my dear fellow?" said Horace, shaking violent hands with Ernest, and looking as radiant as if the sight of him had completed Clyde's earthly happiness, and he was now prepared for a higher sphere. "You know if there is one thing in the world I like it is that."

"Self-denying beast!" muttered Wigram. "Saturday next, half past seven, sharp," he said, touching Ernest as a hint not to interpose. "Dormer can't be in town longer than the week."

"Saturday, yes, delighted," said Horace the sponge. "Half past seven. That will be capital, and it's a treat to see old Ernest again among us."

"You're done, Wigram," muttered Jemmy Rydon.

"Six to two he backs out," replied Wigram.

He knew his man. For Rydon had not time to consider whether he would bet when Clyde said:

"Oh, botheration! My infernal memory! "No, I can't be with you. My aunt, Mrs. Williamson, and the girls are coming to us to dine and go to the opera."

"Eh, Jemmy?" said Wigram. "But," he said, "that's all bosh, my dear fellow, a man's not wanted in an opera box. Mrs. Clyde will take them, and you can dine here and join them afterward. We'll make it eight, if you like."

"Like is not the word, my dear Wigram, but it is impossible. Mrs. Clyde is so nervous that she will go nowhere without me. I am very sorry, but it can't be."

"What are you talking about Saturday for, Wigram?" said Doddy Dalston, who thought he would have a part in the little farce. "Dormer has told you six times that he is engaged on Saturday, and we settled Friday. So you can come on Friday, Clyde, you know, for I heard you say you should dine here that day."

"If I did," said the undaunted Horace, "it was another of my stupid blunders. What would I give for a memory? I am going to take the chair at a distribution of prizes at a school at Clapham. Every thing is against me, you see."

And having evaded two traps set for the purpose of getting him to promise to pay for his own dinner, Horace Clyde went off, secretly exultant, to a table, and used up eighteen sheets of club paper in writing some circulars—he was very industrious.

"Ask him to dine with you, Dormer, on either of those days, and I'll stand the dinner if he don't accept," said Rydon.

"If I were sure of being here I would," said Ernest; "for he would give me some good stories to take home with me—not smoking-room stories, Jemmy. He picks up that sort of thing very cleverly."

"Yes," said Wigram, "and that's part of his trade. He dines on three or four stories of that sort—makes the rich relation laugh, and pleases the lady of the house."

"And that last is a very proper thing to do," said Ernest Dormer. "It happens to be my business just now, and I hope I succeed reasonably well."

"And how is our friend the excitable parson, Dormer?" said Alford. "We were talking of him the other night, and saying that as the club is prosperous we might afford the luxury of a chaplain. Would he like the appointment, and can you vouch for the soundness of his doctrine?"

"I can not answer for him," said Ernest, "but you may judge for yourselves when I tell you that he has scandalized my neighbors by wishing that all missionaries could be eaten by the heathen."

"Why, he must be a good fellow, after all," said the heathenish Jemmy Rydon.

"Has any body denied it?"

"Well, the way he opened fire at Mangles's dinner did not exactly make us wish to see a great deal of him, perhaps. But I am glad we misjudged him."

"You misjudge most people, Jemmy; so if that makes you glad you should be a happy man," said Charley Launceston.

"That Mr. Grafton is a neighbor of yours, I think, Dormer?" said Wigram.

"Yes, his father is rector of the next parish."

"A large, imposing-looking man, who walks about loftily, as if wondering when the Queen is going to send to make him a bishop."

"You know him?"

"I know something about him, which shall be yours in private, as the Roman party says in the play. I never talk scandal for these fellows to repeat and exaggerate."

A mocking murmur went round the group, and Ernest Dormer wondered whether Henry Wigram was the name he was to have from Mangles.

"I am sorry that there should be any scandal about so tremendously respectable a man as the Rector of Saxbury," said Ernest. "I had better not hear it, I fancy, unless you intend me to repeat it in the country, and mention the source whence I got it."

"By Jove, Dormer, you have been schooled to some purpose," said Rydon, laughing. "I have some good things to tell you, but I shall be afraid."

"*You* need not be," said Dormer.

It was a challenge to an answer, but none came from Henry Wigram, and Walter Latrobe entered the room.

"You in town?" was the soldier's salutation to his friend.

"As you see."

"All well at home?"

"All."

Nothing more passed between them at the moment. A stranger would have supposed them almost strangers, but they were the two men who cared more for one another than for all the rest of the club. Walter Latrobe sat down to read a newspaper, and the group dispersing, Ernest Dormer sauntered round to read the club notices, candidates' list, and other *affiches*. But after a quarter of an hour the friends exchanged a look, and Ernest, going to the quiet library, was followed by Latrobe. That big room was very still and gloomy at that hour. Not a single man had as yet retired thither to take a sleep under pretense of reading a blue-book, nor had the one man who usually occupied a table for the entire afternoon, and spread out his papers or threw them on the ground as if the place were his own office, begun to read and write, and rustle and fidget, and growl and grunt, and get about twenty times his rightful share of the services of the domestics. The ticking of a loud clock was all the

sound there until Dormer and Latrobe met again.

"You never wrote that you were coming up."

"I did not know it until yesterday. I came up alone."

"Nothing wrong, you say?"

"Nothing at Naybury. I shall have to ask your opinion on a matter, but at present I won't, because I can say nothing to the purpose."

"All right. And how do you like your new life?"

"Why, my dear Walter, that's a compound question. I am married to the best woman in the world, and I don't think that she is the least happy woman in the world. That, I know, is what you want to know about."

"I rejoice to hear that."

"I don't forget our past talk in the Gardens, and I don't forget what I said to you about my intentions. And up to this moment I may say, as a man to his friend, that in letter and in spirit I have carried out my pledge, and that if I had failed to do so—she being what she is—I should have been ungrateful as well as untruthful."

"That is well," said Walter Latrobe, quietly. He did not deal in exaggeration, and if he said that a thing was well he thought it was very well indeed.

"As for the life itself, you know the beatitude touching him who expecteth nothing. I am not disappointed. I am not even bored yet. And you may be interested in knowing that my wife's happiness will be increased."

"And that I *am* rejoiced at," said Latrobe, with more emphasis than usual.

"I understand," said Ernest Dormer, smiling.

"You did not come up to see me, and I have nothing particular to say to you," said Walter. "Suppose we leave those matters where they are."

Those matters. But the young soldier gave wise advice, and for the moment it was accepted. They had, however, much to say to one another, and went down to Greenwich to say it. Later, as may be supposed, there was little reticence on the part of either of the two men. But Ernest said nothing of his business in London.

In the course of the evening Mr. Mangles, who had released himself from Lady Syleham as soon as he could with courtesy do so, called at the Octagon, and made an opportunity to speak privately to Henry Wigram.

"What is the matter, my serious Samuel?" said that gentleman, when they had drawn apart to a window.

"Not much," said Mangles. "But there is something which you should know."

"Many things, I dare say."

"Listen a moment," said Mangles, impatiently. "You remember a conversation in the smoking-room, some months back, in reference to Ernest Dormer's marriage?"

"Perfectly well."

"You, Wigram, made a certain statement, which you will recollect, because it was made in a whisper, when some men were coming in."

"I remember that also. He has been here to-day. By Jove! Has his coming to town any thing to do with what we spoke of then?"

"That is a question to be answered presently. I want to know whether you are inclined to take the responsibility of admitting that you were the first person to mention the scandal here."

"I don't know that I was."

"You were the first to mention it to myself and some other friends of Dormer's."

"If you say so of course it was so."

"Very well. Now the man does not live who can say that I ever betrayed his confidence. But circumstances have brought it to Dormer's knowledge that his wife's character has been canvassed in this club. He is also aware that I knew it had been canvassed. I have no idea what course he may intend to take, but it will be necessary for me to do one of two things—either to inform him, my old and valued friend, of the way in which the rumor first reached me, or to refuse to do so, and accept the consequences. I do not affect to say that your friendship is as much to me as his, but I hold myself bound to keep your secret unless you release me from it. I do not press you for an answer on the instant, but will you let me have a note at my chambers to-morrow morning?"

"I said just now," answered Wigram, "that Dormer had been here. From something which occurred—mind, I do not doubt for a second that you have been perfectly discreet—I have reason to think he already supposes that I have talked on the subject."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because, in the middle of the frankest and most friendly talk with several other men, he was pleased to answer a remark of mine with something so nearly approaching an insult that I abstained from noticing it only because—for private reasons with which I will not trouble you."

"I repeat," said Mangles, "that I have never hinted at your name. Whether others have been as discreet I can not say, but it does not seem likely that any one would seize the first hour of a man's release, after his marriage, to enter upon that sort of thing. With that, however, I have nothing to do. I have said my say, and I shall expect a line from you in the morning."

"There is nothing like openness, Mangles, and I will say another word. There have been other allusions here to Mr. Dormer's marriage, and especially when you came back from it. It would be insincere in me if I pretended that I did not notice a tone on your part toward me which I suppose to have meant that you disapproved of certain remarks of mine."

"I answer you as openly that I thought—and shall be glad to know that I thought wrongly—that you were inclined to harp upon a painful subject, and did not feel sorry that there were, or might be, reasons for its being painful."

"I merely wished to get at that admission. I have no more to say now."

"You will write to me?"

"If I do not you will have no reason to complain."

"I never complain. I understand you to mean that I shall be satisfied?"

"Yes, I trust so, Mangles."

On their return from Greenwich Dormer and Latrobe again called at the Octagon, and the former found the following note:

"Mr. George Farquhar presents his compliments to Mr. Dormer, and regrets his absence when that gentleman did him the honor to call in Lancaster Street. In accordance with Mr. Dormer's wish, Mr. Farquhar begs leave to say that he will be happy to see Mr. Dormer there at 12 o'clock to-morrow, but should this hour be inconvenient to him he will be good enough to fix his own. Should Mr. Dormer desire to be accompanied by any friend, Mr. Farquhar will have equal pleasure in receiving him."

The note was written in a free, bold hand, and was sealed with arms.

"Extremely decorous, any how," said Dormer, as he walked away to his lodging. "I don't think I shall intrude a friend upon him this time; but the next, which will be very soon after the first, I shall trouble him with the attentions of a friend who will not easily part with him."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

"Well, America, here we are again, and how are you, and are you full of inspirations?" said Mr. John Fletcher, as he entered Mr. Vetch's composing-room, as he called it. "Fine day, plenty of sunshine—who was it that liked to compose with the sun in his eyes—Mozart, or some such person?"

"Don't call Mozart a person, John Fletcher; and why have you left the street door open?"

"Because Frank Beaumont is coming, only he remained in the street to finish his cigar, knowing that the fume is unacceptable to Mrs. Vetch. I hope she is quite well."

"I hope so too," said Mr. Vetch; "but she is gone out of town on a professional engagement."

"Where?"

"I really forget," said Mr. Vetch, with the very worst possible imitation of unconcern. "She has so many engagements—I rather fancy that she is at Brighton."

The fact was that he did not know where she was. It had occurred to the estimable woman, as a refinement in persecution, that she would keep secret the place of a concert engagement she had made. Lauristina had managed it well, and, with all the small cunning of a spiteful wife, had left the house when he was out, and had locked up the letter from the *entrepreneur*. Vetch had no clew whatever. But Brighton was a bad shot.

"I don't think it's Brighton," said Fletcher. "I receive one of the papers, and I know that there is no advertisement about her. I should be sure to notice it."

"It may be Hastings, or Worthing, or Bognor, my dear Sir," said the composer; "I have really too much to think of to charge my memory with Mrs. Vetch's engagements."

"You are a ombogs," thought John Fletcher. "I wonder whether Lauristina has bolted. I hope so, only it would vex him. Here's Francisco. Mr. Vetch, Mr. Beaumont. Sparkling composer. Brilliant dramatist. Now you know one another."

"I knew Beaumont before I knew you," said Vetch.

"Ha! this was never told to me. Did he write psalms for you? he hath a light and pleasant hand for psalmody," said the reckless Fletcher, who was to-day in the highest spirits.

"We have worked together," said Vetch.

"I believe that every body has worked with every body at some time or another," said Fletcher. "You have no idea what aged intimacies I am constantly unearthing. What did you do together? Ah, you have the grace to be ashamed of it; let me not revive humiliating memories. Street ballads, eh? Well, never mind, and remember what Fletcher of Saltoun, my maternal ancestor on the paternal side, remarked, 'Let me have the making of ballads for a—'"

"Don't, John, don't!" shouted Beaumont. "That infernal saying, which every body begins a review with. And don't you know that it is not Fletcher's?—he quotes it as by some unknown person."

"That was his modesty, the damaging blemish in our family. And now, Beaumont, proceed to business. I say, Vetch, might we smoke, as the missis isn't here?"

"Yes," bellowed Vetch, with a furious tone which the authors could not understand. It meant that Lauristina was a cruel wretch to torment him as she did, and he would have his revenge—her curtains should smell of tobacco. But he had hardly given the license when he was sorry for it, and thought of her, singing away for the good of the household, while he was heartlessly allowing her property to be damaged. If ever there was a soft-natured husband it was the long-suffering America Vetch.

"We'll smoke down stairs," he said. "For if a pupil should call and want to see me the odor isn't professional."

So they descended into the den, whereof mention hath been made, and Mr. Vetch carefully closed the door and opened the windows. Then the conclave proceeded to discussion.

"Well, have you found a subject, gentlemen authors?"

"Yes, a stunner," said Fletcher. "Are you ready to go to work?"

"Now, gently over the stones. Who employs me?"

"That's just it," said Fletcher. "I knew that his avaricious and unromantic mind would instantly turn to Mammon."

"There are worse gods than Mammon, Mr. John Fletcher. It strikes me that he has done every thing that has been worth doing in this world for many a year. But it wasn't about money that I was asking. I want to know whose pockets I am going to fill."

"Ours, I hope," said Beaumont.

"Manager, mana-*ger*," said Vetch, in the tone of the gallery when the unwashed honor the director with a "call" to receive their approbation.

"Look here," said Fletcher. "I told you, didn't I now, that Mallow was a humbug, and that we meant to serve him out? He has done us in that matter of *Dido and Æneas*. We were to have an extra fifty if it ran a hundred nights, and he took it out of the bill on the ninety-ninth."

"Smart fellow that," said Vetch, laughing.

"Yes, very smart fellow. But when a man chooses to be so very smart as all that, you know, he puts himself out of the pale, and any reprisals are fair. And if you'll just do the music for us we'll have our rights. I don't want more," said the virtuous Fletcher.

"I bear no malice, but I should like to serve Mallow out also," said Vetch; "for he was extremely rude to my wife when she proposed to come out in opera, in which I believe she would make a splendid success."

"Rude to Mrs. Vetch, was he?" said Fletcher. "The only good thing I ever heard of him," was the dramatist's private thought. "What a ruffian! What did he say?"

"He made a low allusion to Mrs. Vetch's early life, and asked whether she would like an operetta written for her, with a scene of a practicable cook-shop. You can hardly believe in such brutality, but it is true."

"And she had said nothing to offend him, of course," said Beaumont, who knew the story.

"Well, I fancy she did make some joking allusion to a family incident, but it was all in good humor, and we don't retort savagely on a lady for being playful with her tongue."

The playfulness in that case had been, as Beaumont told Fletcher afterward, a gentle reminder that the manager's father had been transported.

"Certainly not," said Beaumont. "The fact adds to one's pleasure in trapping him. I need not tell you now exactly how we shall manage, but the main point is that we want to have a burlesque complete, and if you have faith enough in us to write the music we'll take care you don't lose. I have some money, and Fletcher rolls in gold."

"I've faith, my dear boys. And I'll work. But I tell you what. You'll find it hard to trick an old fox like that, and you have this against you—you are gentlemen and he's t'other thing. He can lie, and you can't. It's a sad fact that that is an awful drawback in this best of all possible worlds."

"We think we see our way, Americanus," said John Fletcher.

"Very well, take it. And now for the subject. What is it?"

"We are going to give the Greeks and Trojans a turn this time."

"Classical again. I wish you wouldn't," said Mr. Vetch.

"Where can you get such good dresses for your girls? I ask you that as a serious and earnest man."

"That is the question, of course," said Vetch, "and I can't answer it. A centipede burlesque; very well."

"Now what does the benighted old savage mean by that?" said Fletcher.

"Supported by a hundred Legs," said Mr. Vetch. "Do you think nobody can make epigrams but yourselves?"

"Calls that an epigram! Well, luckily the greatest composers are the greatest something-elses, or I should not feel justified in going on after that display of debility."

"The subject, Americanus, is *Troilus and Cressida*," said Beaumont.

"Didn't the Avon party do something in that line?"

"He did; nor is the play without merit, though we have improved upon him very materially."

"Also," said Mr. Vetch, "if my memory serves me, there are some scenes in that play which may be very proper in the legitimate drama, but which are entirely unsuited for the public."

"Mr. Beaumont's character and mine, Mr. Vetch, may be your guarantee that you shall not be asked to marry immortal music to immoral meaning."

"I'll get the book," said Mr. Vetch. "I believe I have a copy somewhere."

"Very improbable," said Fletcher; "besides, you need not take the trouble to look. Here is the play," he said, producing a pocket edition. "And here," he continued, taking out a roll of paper, "is the principal part of our improvements on the original. These we shall leave with you, but mind you lock them up."

The words brought back to Mr. Vetch a recollection of the care with which his wife had locked up desk and drawer, and he replied impatiently, but speedily recovered his good temper. In fact it was impossible to be long with John Fletcher and to resist the contagion of his spirits. He saw something to laugh at in every thing earthly, and it was not outside enjoyment; he reveled in his irreverence, and would break out into a roar when alone and seized by a ludicrous image. Some men of this kind are fatiguing, but Fletcher was not; the natural and sincere character of his mirth made it a gift, not a habit. Beaumont, as we have said, was more business-like in his humor, as became a husband and a father expectant.

"Where's the scene?" said Vetch; "and is there any local color?"

"Vocal color's your business," said John Fletcher. "Scene, you great ignoramus! why,

Troy and the Grecian camp. Don't you know that the Greeks besieged Troy, and took it? Did you never hear of the wooden horse that was crammed full of warriors, and how Laocoon drove his spear in, and the warriors howled; yet even this didn't induce the Trojans to look inside, but they let the city be taken after dark, and Laocoon was eaten by snakes, who did not recognize him as a priest of Apollo, because he and his boys went about without any clothes on; *vide* statue."

"Shut up, John, and read the list," said Beaumont.

"I am preparing his mind—tuning him. Now, Vetch, the first party is Priam, the king of Troy—something like Lablache in Oroveso, you know. We mean to keep all his misfortunes out of sight, of course. Then he has five sons, Hector, Troilus, and three others. Hector must be a man. The others must be girls, and they are always quarreling awfully, and being blown up by Priam. You'll find suggestions about a scolding quartette, which we think will be funny."

"But an opening chorus?"

"Yes, in the court of Priam. Defying the Greeks, who are taunted as sneaks, and told to go home in their rotten old beaks. Then we'll have a procession of the Trojan army going to battle, and each of the chiefs will be chaffed as he passes. You must write a march, with breaks in it for the chaff."

"But what's the plot—what does the interest turn upon?"

"Jealousy."

"A disagreeable subject," said Mr. Vetch.

"Not if it is treated ludicrously, and laughed at," said Fletcher. "There is the girl Cressida, and the Trojan Troilus is in love with her, and she swears to be true to him. She goes to the Greek camp, and in a twinkling is in love, or pretends to be, with the Grecian Diomed. Troilus is brought in to see them flirting, and he boils over with rage, and wants to fight Diomed. Don't you see fun in all that, Vetch?"

"Can't say I do. Jealousy is a disease, no doubt; but you have no more right to laugh at it than at any other disease. It is bad taste to do so."

"Audiences enjoy it, I can tell you."

"Well, I tell you I don't like the subject."

"That is only because you really have not considered it. The scene with Troilus peeping at the flirtation, and stamping about, singing fragments of songs, like Masaniello when he's poisoned, will be first-rate. Then the rivals meet, and Troilus gets wopped. I assure you that the situations are excellent. See here, you are a believer in Shakspeare; you don't mean to assert that he would construct a bad play?"

"But does he treat the jealousy comically?"

"It's what he means for comicality, but he hadn't much fun in him," said Mr. Beaumont. "He was too indulgent to get the full effect out of a discomfited character. He was always picking him up before he had been half kicked enough. We'll mend that vice of mercy."

"I wish we could hit upon something better than this, authors," said Mr. Vetch.

"Come, old man," said Fletcher, "I promised you that we would be docile and submissive; but when you come to the rejection of the entire thing you put us in a hole."

"The burlesque will be a very good one," said Beaumont, gravely, "and you can form no idea of it from this chatter. But if you persist in not seeing your way, why there is an end of the business."

"Now don't fly away like that, Frank Beaumont," said Mr. Vetch. "One may have an opinion, and yet not want to throw a thing up. I said, and I say it again, that jealousy, when it is well founded, is not a thing to laugh at, and I should as soon make fun of any other fever."

"Any other yellow fever," said Fletcher.

"But if you think differently, and have put words that you think comic, I'll do my best with them."

"You're a brick, Vetch. I tell you they are capital. Troilus can't go to the camp at first, and so he stands imagining to himself all the things his idol is doing or permitting. Now she smiles, now she lets the other fellow kiss her hand, now she pretends to be offended, now she makes it up and gives him her *bouquet*, now he gets his arm round her—now—hang it, Vetch, what the devil is the matter with you?"

He might reasonably ask, for that eminent composer was indulging in a series of facial contortions which would have rejoiced Lavater, or rather Fuseli. And his lips were white, and he glared. Presently he got up and left the room.

"Is he mad?" said Fletcher.

"You've been doing your best to make him so," said his friend, laughing. "I thought you knew."

"Knew what?"

"Why, that he is about ten times as jealous of Lauristina as Troilus was of Cressida. I did not know it until lately, for he is a good fellow, and keeps his evil thoughts to himself, but Grace Clare told me."

"Jealous of her—that cold, fat, hard, heartless singing-machine!" said Fletcher, astonished. "Well, I am flabberghasted. I always hated her; but that she should have the consummate impudence to make any decent man jealous is an unpardonable audacity which makes me inclined to forgive Mallow. Jealous of her! Why, who in the world ever thinks twice of the animal, except as a thing that plays several tunes with her throat, and does it well?"

"Nobody, I believe; but Vetch thinks all the world is always plotting to take her away from him."

"No such luck for him. Do you think she encourages his delusion?"

"Yes. For that, you know," said the tolerant Beaumont, "one can't blame any thing that calls itself a woman. When a man puts that sort of thing into her head, and shows her that

he thinks her a wonderful being, she must be either fool or angel if she does not accept the situation. But this creature is malicious, and takes a pleasure in tormenting the man simply because he is at her mercy."

"Couldn't we make him rebel?"

"We do these things in comedies, but in real life something is sure to make a hitch—the fact that folks are in earnest, I suppose. No, I sha'n't interfere. It's not my business, nor is it yours. And another thing—he would not thank you for disenchanting him."

"I wish I were a musical critic still. I'd give her something!"

"My dear John, you would be doing an injustice. The woman can sing."

"Yes, confound her! she can. A mistake somewhere. Nobody with a bad heart ought to have a voice like that. Here he is again."

"Excuse me, my boys," said Mr. Vetch, returning, "but a spasmodic affection troubles me at times, and my only chance is to walk about and gasp. The process is not dignified, but it is better than torture."

"We called it the hiccups when I was a little boy," said Fletcher, "and cured it in a friend by suddenly giving him a violent pinch. Fancy its being elevated to the rank of a spasmodic affection!"

"A long word is more comforting to a sufferer," said Beaumont. "There is something soothing in long words. I never saw any thing to laugh at in the poor old woman who could not understand much of the sermon, but had been greatly consoled by that blessed word Mesopotamia."

A word which was not exactly blessed escaped Mr. Vetch at the moment, and it followed upon a loud knocking at the street-door.

"What a row your pupils make, Vetch!" said Fletcher. "Nobody with a soul for music would make that atrocious din. Let me go out and blow them up."

"It isn't pupils," said Mr. Vetch.

He was in what used to be called a quandary, but as the fastidious Doctor Webster says that is a low word, we must substitute a perplexity. He believed, and rightly, that Mrs. Vetch had come home. And he felt that she had wronged and insulted him by going away as she had done, and he had proposed to himself to receive her with a certain wounded dignity, and even with rebuke, if he should find himself equal to that process. But, on the other hand, here were witnesses, and he could not scold his wife before them, and therefore he should be obliged to condone her offense.

"No," said Fletcher, "I hear the silver voice of Mrs. Vetch. Let us go out and welcome her."

He did not speak ironically, for Lauristina's voice could be very pleasant when she chose, and at this moment she was taking leave of somebody in a most kind and almost affectionate manner. A man's tones were heard in reply, and then the door closed, and wheels crunched. As they ground in the gravel Mr. Vetch ground his teeth.

Mrs. Lauristina Vetch entered the room. She was charmingly dressed, and looked exceedingly well. And she was quite gracious to the two authors, and smilingly told them that they might have come out and spoken to her—she was guided to the room only by the smell of the cigars, which must be very good ones, and quite unlike the dreadful rubbish which she was in the habit of smelling in that house.

All of which was fittingly responded to, and the two gentlemen regarded her with admiring looks, and behaved as if they were enchanted to talk to the accomplished artist.

"I should have come out, Mrs. Vetch," said Fletcher, "but I supposed that it was the proud privilege of a husband to receive his wife on her return home. I am not a married man myself, unhappily, but I have observed my friend Mr. Beaumont, who has the happiness of being one."

"My husband," said Mrs. Vetch, looking round, as if discovering for the first time that he was in the room. "I might stand at the door all night in the rain before it would occur to him to open the door. I believe he considers that it is one of the prerogatives of talent to neglect courtesy, but I think that it should be talent of a very high kind indeed that justifies that."

"Really," said the unfortunate Vetch, "this is a little unfair. I could not know that you had come home, and you have remonstrated against my appearing in a shooting-jacket before your pupils. Had it been one of them you would have scolded me."

"There, Mr. Fletcher," said Lauristina, sadly, "you hardly seemed to believe me the other day when I just alluded to the kind of treatment which I receive here. I have been away for two days, toiling and slaving, and the first greeting I receive from my husband is sarcasm and reproach."

"It is only a symptom of his happiness at regaining you, Mrs. Vetch," said Beaumont. "You know that delight often manifests itself in an eccentric way. Is it not so, America?"

"Pray don't encourage him in the use of that idiotic name, Mr. Beaumont. I am ashamed whenever I hear it. It is strange that he could not see that his Yankee friends were laughing at him when they gave it him. I will burn that ridiculous certificate one of these days."

The amiable Lauristina would have done it long ago, but it was more satisfactory to her to have the opportunity of constantly threatening to do it.

"May we hope that you have had a successful journey, or tour, or whatever it was, Mrs. Vetch," said Mr. Beaumont. "I don't think your husband mentioned which way you had been."

"Did he not?" said the lady, with a smile. "I dare say not. Perhaps he would tell you that he did not know—you do not suppose that he stoops to interest himself in my movements."

"I did not say so," said Vetch, stung into anger by this unparalleled injury, "but I say so now. I do not know where you have been."

"There, gentlemen," said Mrs. Vetch, humbly. "Mr. Vetch owns that he never took the trouble to inquire where I was going. The house might have been on fire, or some family misfortune might have happened, and he would have been unable to let me know."

"Or he might have been taken ill. It *was* careless, Vetch," said Fletcher.

"No danger of that," said Mrs. Vetch. "He takes good care of himself. I may be out at all hours, and have to wait for a carriage, or come home in a common cab, and have to quarrel with the driver at the door, but Mr. Vetch will be comfortable in his slippers, and what he calls his shooting-jacket, as if he ever went shooting in his life, or knows one end of a gun from the other."

Now if she had said that he could not compose he would have laughed, but having in the course of his life shot half a dozen rabbits Mr. Vetch was indignant at being charged with not being a proficient in field sports, and he was roused to say something which was as bitter as he ever said in a rejoinder.

"My dear, you have come home in a sweet temper to-day."

"Of course," said Mrs. Vetch, "if I venture to remonstrate against neglect I am the party in the wrong. Perhaps I am a little annoyed. I could not help saying to Captain Rodney, as we came up to town, that it is sometimes vexing to a wife to have to depend upon the kindness and attention of any body but her husband."

"I don't know the gentleman," said Mr. Vetch, with suppressed dismay, "but I make no doubt he agreed with you."

"Of course you do not know him. You take no pains to know any of my friends. I can hardly be too much obliged to him for the trouble he took with me in finding me a lodging, and seeing that I was made comfortable. Indeed, I owe it entirely to his attention that I have enjoyed the trip at all, for Ramsgate is not a pleasant place at this time of the year."

"Oh, you have been to Ramsgate," said Mr. Vetch.

"What nonsense to pretend you did not know it, when the programme of the concert is there under your very eyes," said Mrs. Vetch, with a very good show of indignation.

This was a very good stroke of hers. As has been said, she had much cunning, and usually managed to be in the right, or at least to have an available defense in small things. Here she was able in the presence of two credible witnesses utterly to demolish her husband's allegation that she had gone away without giving him notice, and it suited her to do so.

"Under my eyes!" said Vetch. "I have never seen it." And he rose and looked around every where.

"That is very good acting," said Lauristina, bitterly, "and if it were not done for the sake of humiliating your wife I should admire it. But I can not let myself be made the victim of a false charge. I put this," she said, crossing to the table, and holding up a paper—"I put this on the desk in the morning, hours before I went, in order to remind you, and that I might see you before I left."

And it was true that she had placed it there at the time she mentioned. But inasmuch as she had carefully laid it inside another and an older paper, some charity appeal, on which the eyes of the three men had been resting for the last hour, it was not so wonderful that Mr. Vetch had failed to see it.

"What do you say to that, Mr. Beaumont?" she asked, triumphantly exhibiting the programme, on which the name of Madame Lauristina Vetch was duly and prominently displayed.

"Clearly Mr. Vetch can not read," said Fletcher. "We must subscribe and have him educated up to that point, if you think that his intellect will not suffer by the exertion."

"And if he had condescended to read my programme, he would have seen also that his wife had ventured to sing, for the first time in public, one of his own songs. I did not like to say any thing about it until all was over, because I might have broken down from thinking of the way he uses me. But there, you see, is the song which I had the pleasure of interpreting." And she read:

First Time in Public.

O Wipe Mine Eye (America Vetch)—Madame Lauristina Vetch.

"Yes," she continued, "and I held up, and got an encore. And this is the way I am repaid."

"My darling!" said Vetch, in a gush of remorse and affection and gratitude, and all the rest of it. And regardless of the two credible witnesses, he enfolded his wife in his arms.

"She wiped *his* eye," said Beaumont to Fletcher, after they had made their escape.

"Detestable cat!" said Mr. Fletcher.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DEAD MAN'S HAND.

About an hour before the time which had been appointed by Mr. Farquhar for Ernest Dormer's visit to Lancaster Street, Mr. Dudley, who was on his own premises, received a note from Farquhar, which caused the medical gentleman to rage furiously, and then to hail a cab violently, and hurry up to his friend's lodgings in Judd Street.

Mr. Dudley's knock was not of the kind which a professional man usually gives on the door of a patient, nor was his step up stairs one of a gentle nature. Instinctively, however, he forbore from speech until the slatternly girl-of-all-work had left the room in which Farquhar was. It was the front-room, into which the young man

had come, partially dressed, and where, on the hard black sofa, and with a railway rug wrapped round him, he was lying. The fume of vile tobacco was very present, and Mr. Dudley, without a word, set both windows wide open.

"Don't," feebly protested Farquhar. "I am chilled enough as it is."

"You can't humbug me," was the grim retort of his medical friend, who added, coming close to him: "Get up, and go in and dress yourself. It is past eleven now."

"I can't," responded Mr. Farquhar. "I am really so ill that I am good for nothing—you can see that for yourself."

"You are not good for much; but much or little, you are going back in the cab with me."

"I swear to you that I am utterly unfit to move, Dudley, and as for the business, you must really manage it yourself. I have no nerve whatever. I should break down and spoil your whole plan."

"That is it," said Mr. Dudley. "You are a coward—a sheer, miserable coward, and you'll never do any good for yourself in this world. But I did not think you would have skulked away from me like this."

"I am not skulking. If I were well, or anything like well, I would do what you wish with pleasure, but just look at me. I am as nervous as a cat."

"Of course. You have been knocking yourself to pieces again with that blackguard tobacco. It is most treacherous and unfriendly of you, if you are half as bad as you pretend. But I don't believe you are. It is simply a dodge to evade meeting Mr. Dormer."

"If you can look at me, and say that I am not ill, I need talk no more," answered Farquhar. "I am about as fit to meet Mr. Dormer or any body else as I am to fight a mad bull. It is you who are unfriendly to bluster at a fellow who is too weak to take his own part."

"Now I tell you what it is, my fine fellow who is too weak to take his own part," said Mr. Dudley. "You throw me over. Very good. That is my business. But when I have got rid of Dormer I shall write a letter, and that will be your business."

"To whom?" asked Farquhar. He was wretchedly pallid, but the menace made him even whiter than before.

"You'll know in good time. But I have no secrets, and I'll tell you. I mean to inform your father that, as your professional adviser, it is my duty to apprise him of your condition, and of the causes that have brought it about. He ought to know how you are; at least I won't have the responsibility of keeping him in ignorance."

"And you call yourself my friend?"

"I do nothing of the sort. I have been your friend, and a pretty good one, and I would have been again, but when you turn traitor on my hands there's an end."

"I do not."

"I say you do. Did I not specially order you to take care of yourself, and live by my rules, at least until this business should be done? And here you have been drinking and smoking yourself into a condition that makes you useless to yourself and every body else."

"Any how you own I am ill."

"Ill!" repeated Dudley, with a savage sneer. "Men have been ill before this; but when there was man's work to do they have roused themselves for it, and done it, and died afterward, and so have women, and I have seen them do it. But you have not an ounce of pluck in your body. Yes, I see now that you are ill enough, and I am afraid to screw you up, as I could do with a better fellow, for you would burst out crying, and throw yourself at Mr. Dormer's feet, and beg mercy. You may have to do it yet."

With which consoling words Mr. Dudley abruptly left the room, regardless of the appeal which Farquhar sent after him, and the wheels of the cab speedily apprised the patient that his friend had departed.

Mr. Dudley was too practical a man to waste time, just then, in lavishing much commination against the feeble creature whom he had intended to use, and who had foiled him. He eased his mind with one enormous execration, and then addressed himself to the consideration of the course which was now forced upon him. He would have to meet Ernest Dormer, in the first instance, and the plan which he had decided on was useless. He had almost to manœuvre in the face of the enemy. But, to use a favorite phrase of his own, he was equal to the situation.

Clean shaven, dressed in an eminently respectable manner, and perusing—or at least holding in his hand a solemn-looking work on Pathology, Mr. Benjamin Dudley, in the tolerably well-furnished apartment over his shop, awaited the arrival of Mr. Dormer.

Ernest was punctual.

When he was a man about town he was accustomed, like other men of his class, to carry a very thin umbrella. But in the country he had discarded this delicate companion, and had taken to a stoutish stick. That stick, or another, he had brought with him to the meeting. The fact did not escape the notice of Mr. Dudley.

He received his visitor with more than professional gravity, and pointed to a chair, which happened to face the light, to which his own back was turned. But Ernest Dormer, who had made up his own mind as to the manner in which he would conduct the early part of the interview—the remainder would be a case of *alors comme alors*—smiled, and seated himself carelessly on a sofa at some distance.

"I find that the gentleman who wrote to me is not here," said Dormer.

"I regret to say that Mr. Farquhar is suffering from sudden and violent illness," said Mr. Dudley. "He has been laboring too hard at his professional studies, with a view to an examination, and he has prostrated himself by overexertion."

"Energetic young men will do these things," said Ernest.

"You particularly wished to see him, I infer?" said Mr. Dudley.

"No, the particular wish was the other way," replied Dormer.

"He is, as I have said, very ill," said Mr. Dudley, "and he may not have explained himself to me in the most accurate manner, but the impression which he left upon my mind—if an incorrect one you will rectify it—was that you had some species of proposal to submit to him."

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you," said Ernest, with a slight smile.

"Then may I ask," said Mr. Dudley, "what is the object of your visit? That I may justify that question, I should premise that I am his relative, and I should call myself his guardian but that men at his time of life do not think much of that functionary."

"I came because he wrote to ask me to come."

"But you are strangers, I believe?"

"Entirely."

"I assume, however, that you would hardly have taken the trouble to pay him two visits unless you had some stronger reason than an invitation from an unknown person."

"I had that invitation, and I have accepted it, and I await explanation," said Ernest Dormer, with perfect composure.

"You are, of course," said Mr. Dudley, "entirely right in not taking the initiative, and I am, like Mr. Farquhar, a stranger to you. I may as well mention that my name is Dudley, and that I am a medical man, and what is termed a general practitioner. Mr. Farquhar is my friend and ward. Having said this, it will be for you to decide whether, in his enforced absence, you pursue the object for which you may have come."

"My only object is to know what Mr. Farquhar wants. Can you tell me?"

"It is curious that my young friend's phraseology was precisely similar to your own, and the case of your language will be the excuse for his. He said, as well as he could, poor fellow, 'See Mr. Dormer and find out what he wants.'"

"I see," said Ernest Dormer, rising. "Well, I am as sorry for his illness as I ought to be for that of a gentleman whom I have not the honor of knowing, and when you have cured him he can write to me again. He knows my club. Good-day, Mr. Dudley."

Looking round the room with that peculiar glance which is not thought to imply abstract admiration so much as wonder whether one is likely to see the place again, Ernest Dormer put on his hat and went toward the door.

"I may, without offense, compliment you on your aptitude for comedy, Mr. Dormer," said Dudley.

"No well-intended compliment should give offense," said Ernest, turning and slightly raising his hat. "Tragedy used to be thought more in my way," he added, carelessly, and again approaching the door.

"And that, perhaps, may be well," said Dudley, somewhat emphatically; for he felt that unless he stopped Ernest on the instant, much work would have to be done afresh.

"I don't understand," said Dormer.

"We should all be prepared for serious incidents," returned Mr. Dudley. "My remark had no special reference, at least I have no right to say that it had."

"A mysterious state of things, Mr. Dudley, when a man has no right to explain his own meaning."

"Do you wish for an explanation?" said Dudley, adroitly.

"You wish to give it, I perceive," replied Dormer. "Pray do."

And with something of a smile Ernest stood leaning with both hands on his stick, and as prepared to listen to what scarcely interested him.

"It seems a pity," said Mr. Dudley, gradually changing his manner, and abandoning some of his solemnity and his long words, "that men of business should waste time in fencing. As representing my young friend, I felt it my duty to fulfill his instructions, and ask you to speak out, but as you have clearly made up your mind not to do so, I may help matters by saying that I am not entirely unaware of the circumstances that have brought you here."

"Well, Mr. Dudley," said Ernest, cheerfully, "if that means that in the absence of your friend you are ready to speak for him, I think you might as well have said so at first. But better late than never. Now then?"

And he again took off his hat and sat down.

"A cool hand," thought Dudley, "but we may quicken the pulse."

He had a far colder hand to play. And now his time had come, and he was to see whether the gods had really wearied of the favorite sport to which reference was made when we first became acquainted with this good man.

"I may ask you, at all events, Mr. Dormer—?"

"If I have failed to impress upon you, Mr. Dudley, that I am not here to answer any questions," interrupted Ernest, "your compliment to my histrionic powers has been misplaced. I am here to know, if I may be so favored, what your friend wants."

"Money."

"Of course he does," said Ernest Dormer, with a good-natured impatience. "There was no difficulty in guessing that. Why does he ask it, and for whom, and how much is wanted? Surely, that is talking, as you say, like a man of business."

"The first two questions you are able to answer for yourself. And the answer to the third does not depend on us."

"You mean that he wants as much as I am prepared to give. But that is a wild way of putting it. I think you will serve him better by being frank with me, Mr. Dudley."

"I will be frank enough presently, Sir, do not be afraid. You are more likely to accuse me of excess in frankness. But it is impossible

for two embassadors to treat until they know the extent of each other's powers. Mine are ample. What are yours?"

"Embassadors, Mr. Dudley? It is a portentous word, and I mean no personal disrespect in saying that it is a ridiculous one."

"I fail to see that. At all events it conveys my meaning. I am here on the part of Mr. George Farquhar."

"And on whose part, in the devil's name, do you suppose me to be here?"

"It is you, Sir, not I, who commit the indiscretion of bringing the name you have mentioned so near to another. I presume I have the honor of addressing the—well, the representative of Mrs. Dormer?"

"You address Mr. Dormer, Sir, who acts for himself, and you will be good enough to leave the other name out of our conversation."

"I shall be glad to do so, provided you assent to my suggestion that you perfectly well understand the nature of Mr. Farquhar's claims."

"Claims, Sir. I know of none."

"Then, Sir, you compel me to state them, and have only yourself to thank should the statement take a disagreeable form. Why need this be? Think better of it, assume the past, and make your offer. I have influence enough with my ward to prevent his being unreasonable."

Ernest Dormer looked steadily at Dudley for a minute or more, and while he did so he recurred to the conversation in Mangles's chambers. Dudley, who had now braced himself for the crowning effort, met his glance with complete resolution, almost with sternness.

"I was not altogether unprepared to hear something like this," said Dormer, contemptuously.

"That I think extremely probable," replied Dudley, answering the words and not the tone. "It shows that a good understanding exists—where such a thing should always exist," he added.

"If I comprehend you, Mr. Dudley," said Ernest, haughtily, "you are again trespassing on ground from which I have warned you. I advise you not to do this again."

"Might I ask why I should be deterred from saying what seems to me necessary?"

"Because," said Ernest Dormer, "you might tempt me to forget your character of embassador."

He might not have intended a hostile demonstration, but his stick, on which he had been leaning, transferred itself to his right hand, and Dudley's eye followed the movement.

"Mr. Dormer," he said, calmly, "one word. You are younger than I am, and possibly you are more active. You ought to be, living in leisure in the country, while I am kept in town at hard, but not wholesome work. These considerations, and another, namely, the idea that I might say that which should excite you to violence, made it a duty to myself to be able to tell you that we are not a match, for I have the means of something more than self-defense. I suppose I have said enough to a man who is brave, but not fool-hardy."

Mr. Dudley said this very well, and not at all offensively. It was uttered rather in the tone of a medical man dilating upon a case, and giving sound advice to the patient.

"You have shown yourself discreet, Mr. Dudley," said Ernest, "and you have done well to remind me that the character of your present office ought to secure you from a gentleman's anger. Now, Sir, if you like to go on, I promise to give you no further cause for apprehension."

"I feel none, Sir. It is possible that you may regret the tone in which you have received what was certainly not said uncourteously. Had we not better keep to business? I will not ask you again what you are empowered to do, but I shall be glad to hear what you propose to do."

"Nothing, of course," said Ernest, "while the word claims is used. If for that you substitute the word charity, and let me know the circumstances of the applicant, I shall probably not disappoint him."

"It is now clear to me, Mr. Dormer, that you are not admitted to the confidence which I supposed you to possess. As you have undertaken not to be offended I speak without timidity," added Dudley, with a scornful emphasis on the last word. "That Mr. Farquhar has legal claims on you I am not prepared to assert; but there is a class of claim which can not be enforced by law, but which few wise men are inclined to neglect. I take Mr. Farquhar's to be one of these."

"I am not disposed to guess at it, Mr. Dudley. You may state it plainly or refuse to do so. I care not which."

"Again I say that you need not fear my not speaking plainly. My object, however, is to avoid giving needless pain."

"You dare to imply that you can say something which it would pain me to hear? You mistake your game, Mr. Dudley."

"It may be so," said Dudley, quietly. "Will you allow me to adopt a word of yours, and say that I imagine you may like to do a charitable action?"

"That is more like it," said Ernest, somewhat wondering at the suddenness with which Dudley had, as Dormer supposed, shifted his ground. "I am told of a service rendered a good while ago to a lady. I suppose the person who rendered it is in distress, and therefore he wishes his good act remembered. Why can not he, or you, or somebody, say what he wants done for him?"

It was now Dudley's turn to gaze steadily at Ernest, and to endeavor to get some clew to the meaning of the latter. But, of course, after a rapid review of all that Dudley knew, or believed he knew, or could guess at, he was entirely at fault, and, like a wise hunter, he tried back. This was too important a moment for him to try a subtler course, and seek to extract from Dormer what the service had been. Dudley rose to

the situation, and would not be beguiled into any abandonment of his plan.

"We are speaking on different subjects, Mr. Dormer. We can refer, by-and-by, if you please, to the topic which occupies your mind, or which, pardon me, you insist on putting forward, instead of the real question. I said that I would suggest a charitable act to you, and there is no objection to your adopting that form, if it pleases you. A friend of mine has for some time been the possessor of a piece of jewelry—"

"Jewelry?"

"Yes. The article is not very valuable, I own. But it has a factitious value for him, and it may have for others, from the circumstances under which it came into his hands, and from a certain inscription which it bears. If upon consideration—full consideration, Mr. Dormer, if you please—this little article should seem worth your purchase, and with it, you understand, you would purchase its history, thenceforth to be exclusively your own—exclusively your own—you can place your own price upon it, and I shall be happy to give you all information which may help you to fix a just price."

He leaned forward while saying this, and gave due emphasis to every syllable.

"Where is this thing?" said Ernest Dormer, coldly.

"Here."

Mr. Dudley unlocked a small box, which Ernest had noticed near the other's hand, and had supposed to contain surgical instruments. Dudley did so very deliberately, and took out something wrapped in white paper, which was sealed.

"Few eyes have seen this, Mr. Dormer," said Dudley, breaking the seals. "It has been in my possession from the time it passed from the care of the donor to that of one person who now sees nothing."

He placed a locket of gold in the hand of Ernest Dormer.

Ernest took it with slight show of interest. He believed that he was about to be tricked in some way unless he could defeat the attempt, and he examined the trinket with some manifestation of contempt.

"Well," he said, "a locket, worth, if it is gold, some four or five pounds."

"Scarcely so much, I should have thought," said Dudley. "But I believe that its real value may be ascertained by looking inside."

Ernest pressed the spring, and the side opened. There was a small lock of hair below the crystal, and on the inside of the portion that had fallen was an inscription.

"I have not read what is engraved since the day the thing came into my hands," said Dudley; "but, unless my memory betrays me, the inscription is: 'M. C. to P. V. *To remind him of what she will never forget.*'"

"Yes," said Ernest Dormer, quietly, "that is the inscription, and you have no complaint to make against your memory, Mr. Dudley, for it has served you well."

"And am I as well served by my imagination," said Dudley, "which tells me to supply the names indicated by those initials?"

"I don't know," said Dormer, "but my interpretation is at your service. I take the locket to have been a present from Magdalen Conway to Percy Vaughan."

"You were aware of its existence?"

"That is my business, Mr. Dudley."

"And you are not curious to know how it came into my possession?"

"Not I. There are fifty ways. Mr. Vaughan lived in Gray's Inn, and his laundress probably stole it and sold it to you when he had left the country."

"Ah! you knew that he had left the country."

"You hear that I knew it."

"And why he left it?"

"I know as much about that as I wish to know. Tell him so; and once more I ask you what kind of assistance he requires from me."

Dudley, who had hitherto borne himself manfully, now turned very white indeed. Were the gods going to play him another trick? Had this Dormer got possession of the whole secret, *or as much of it as was worth any thing*, and did he not care about it? Was the golden fruit which Dudley had tended so long and anxiously nothing but a Dead Sea apple?

Well, he must find that out.

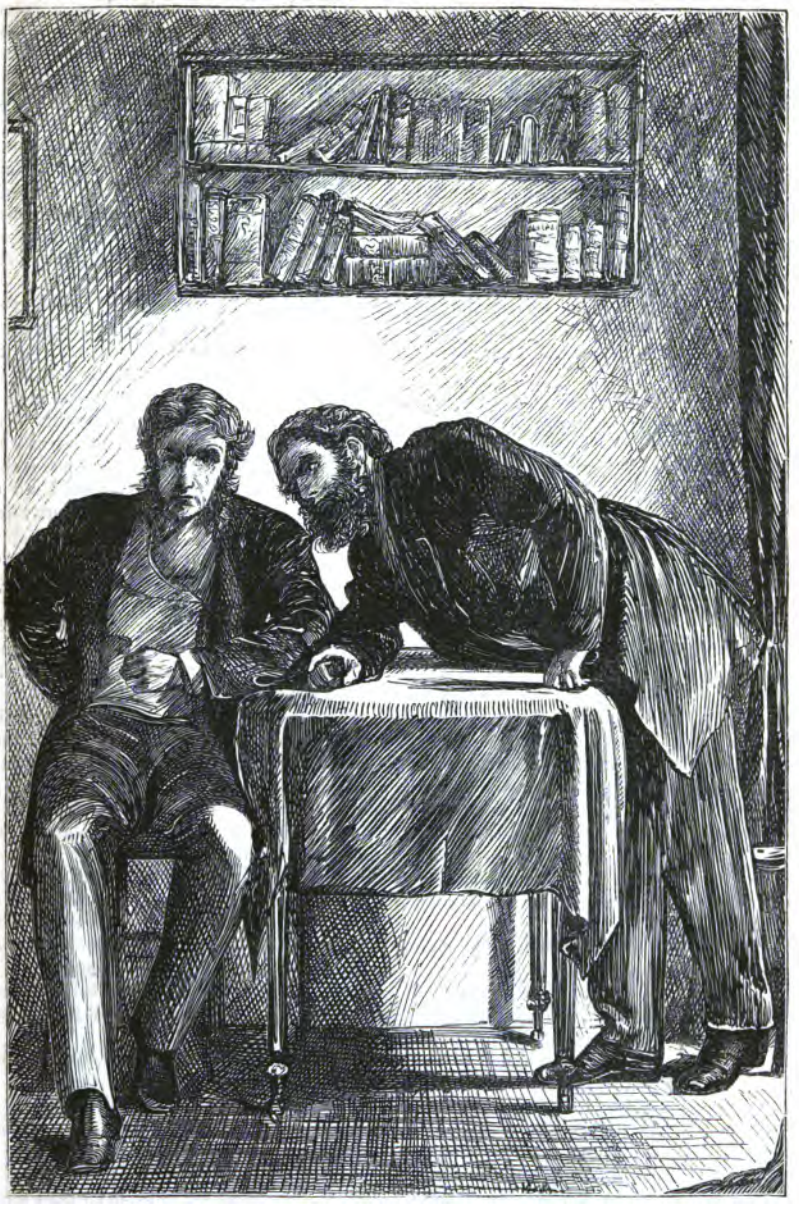
"If you really know the truth, Mr. Dormer," said Dudley, scarcely able to suppress his agitation, "you must be aware that Percy Vaughan dare not show his face in England. We are indulgent enough, but we do not permit in our streets the presence of a known Murderer."

"Oh, is that the scandal?" said Ernest Dormer, calmly, and utterly disbelieving the speaker. "That is a sad name to give a man. But since it does not prevent you, or Mr. Farquhar, who is, I suppose, a go-between, from befriending Mr. Vaughan, I say again that one of you may convey my message, and provided I can be sure that the money will reach him I abide by what I have said. Murder? Could you not have accounted in some milder way for your friend's being in hiding?"

"You do *not* know," exclaimed Dudley, whose pulse now beat fast and furious, for he saw that the game was his.

"Do not know what?" replied Ernest, with irritation.

"That which I have to tell you. The locket in your hand was brought to Vaughan's chambers by the young lady whose initials are there. Why she was there it is for her to explain, if her husband wishes to know. But that he may not be afraid of too many witnesses to her presence, I inform him that a workman, whose name was Andrew Barton, and who died in my surgery down stairs a few minutes after informing me how he had been treated, was pushed from the parapet of the house in Gray's Inn by the hand of the gentleman whose initials are also on that locket."



THE DEAD MAN'S HAND.

Ernest Dormer sprang to his feet and approached Dudley.

"Are you lying?" said Ernest, in a low voice.

"No, Sir," said Dudley, in the same tone.

"You are. I feel you are."

"I take no heed of your words, Sir. I should be a coward to do so at such a moment. When you want proof, come to me again, and bring, if you please, some adviser who will be calmer than yourself."

"It must be false. Men are not killed and buried, and no one to ask how."

"There was an inquest. You can see the report. I will give you the date. But you can not know, except from an entry made by me at the time, and which I will show you, what Barton said to me just before breathing his last. I suppressed it at the inquest, for it could do no good and would have wrought fearful harm."

"Mr. Dudley," said Ernest Dormer, after

some minutes of silence, during which his agitation was visible, though he put forth all his strength to control it, "if this story be true, I do not know what I shall do. But if it turns out false, I know well what I will do—and *you* know. I see that."

"I see what your eyes mean. I almost wish that I had your vengeance to fear. I could sooner brave that than recollect how I have made you suffer."

"Keep your pity, Sir," said Dormer, furiously. "Answer me one thing more, and weigh well your words, for they may be your life or your death one day. Did that dead man say that it was in *her* presence that—that he fell?"

Dudley's reply was hissed into Dormer's ear rather than spoken.

Then Ernest Dormer, drawing himself together, as it were, and mechanically replacing his hat, left the house.

"I felt that I should quicken that pulse," said Dudley. "The dead man's hand is played out at last."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GRAY'S INN GARDENS.

"FRIENDS! I have no friends," said Ernest Dormer, bitterly.

He spoke aloud, for the first time since leaving Dudley's house an hour before, and the words were his answer to what had recurred to him again and again during his wandering walk.

He had taken no note of the quarter through which he was straying, except that he had instinctively turned his face away from the district in which his own class resided—his own class, for which for the hour he felt a savage hate, unlike any thing he remembered to have entertained for his fellows.

"Mangles, perhaps, who contrived to make me believe in his regard, yet allowed me to walk blindfold into the net which he saw. He will advise me to go to the Continent, and offer me a situation as correspondent for his paper. Walter Latrobe. He knows too much to deal fairly with me, and he always takes the woman's side in all things. He will tell me to hold my tongue, and suffer in silence—he would do it himself. Milwarden, Alford, Rydon—don't I see them all? Devilish disagreeable business, my dear fellow, but you knew what women were, and you must make the best of it—*we'll* say nothing, of course—what do you think of a trip to America—am told the boats are capital and the *cuisine* first-rate? Friends. I have been my own friend hitherto, and I thought I was to be trusted. I suppose I am awake. I don't know. May I ask you where I am?" he said, addressing a passer-by, "I have missed my way."

"Ha! ha! Was it a joke, or did you really not recognize me?" said a loud voice—a pleasant, rolling utterance.

"Sergeant Penguin."

"No, you did not know me. That look was too natural to be an actor's. I am a judge of that sort of thing, whether I shall ever be another kind of judge or not. I haven't strutted and fretted my time, and then put witnesses through their paces, for nothing. You did not know me."

"I did not. I am very glad to see you."

"I *am* glad," said Ernest Dormer to himself. "I will talk to this man. He is very shrewd and keen, and he would do his best to hang me to-morrow if he happened to be retained against me. It seems to me that this is just the friend I want."

"The gladness is mutual," said the Sergeant, shaking Dormer's hand in a most affectionate manner—it was the Sergeant's way. "But you were not in earnest in saying that you had lost your way. I always cite you as the man who knows every thing. This is Doughty Street, Bedford Row—most respectable street, once highly regarded. Edifice to your left a chapel for schismatics, of what persuasion I am unaware. Square before you, Mecklenburg Square, weedy, but genteel."

"I have been in the country," said Dormer, "and one soon forgets old localities. I know the place now perfectly well."

"Yes, we heard of your happiness. How dost thou, Benedick, the married man?" quoted Sergeant Penguin. "Remember the line?"

"Claudio, isn't it?"

"No, Sir, Don Pedro. I have played him. I refused Claudio, for I could not make up my mind to personate a beast who believed the evidence of scoundrels against an innocent girl, and then publicly exposed her; besides, I was too fat," added the Sergeant, with his usual frankness of confession.

"Yes, he did that," said Ernest.

"The meanest character our William ever drew, and the nature of the fellow is capitally sustained to the end, for instead of being silently thankful that his cowardly conduct is forgiven, he immediately begins being flippant. I suspect Benedick kicked him in the afterdays."

"He believed what he saw," said Ernest. "Which way are you going?"

"I really don't care. I usually stroll for half an hour after lunch, and look into the bookstalls, or commit some other idleness."

"I don't care about book-stalls to-day," said Dormer. "Could we walk any where where I could say a dozen words to you?"

"Certainly. I will beckon you to a more removed ground. Let us go into Gray's Inn gardens. I am curious to hear what you want to say, as my existence was certainly not in your mind five minutes since."

"Quite true, and my meeting you was a lucky accident."

They crossed King's Road, and went down by Raymond's Buildings into Gray's Inn.

"Is this a fatality?" said Ernest to himself. "Nonsense, I was in Holborn and have kept near it. I meet a lawyer, and naturally come

with him into lawyers' quarters. Surely I am not going to be a fool."

He looked round him somewhat earnestly, and the Sergeant burst into another jolly laugh.

"Come, my good Dormer, that won't do. You won't pretend not to know Gray's Inn. Finer gentlemen than you or I have lived here, my son."

"I know the place well. I had half a chamber here once, and never was happier."

"Until now, of course, we mean, so I will not report your unpleasant speech to Mrs. Dormer, the less that I have not the honor of her acquaintance."

No, the mention of his wife's name did not grate upon his ear. Indeed it seemed the most natural thing to him, at that minute, that every body should begin to talk about her.

"But you seem," continued the Sergeant, "as if you wanted to take your half chamber again, only you don't know where to look for it."

"It isn't that," said Ernest. "I will have it out at once," he said to himself.

Yet he was silent for some time, as they stood near the old iron gates.

"Well," said Sergeant Penguin, "'taste your feet, I mean to put them in motion!'"

"Did I read or did I dream," said Ernest Dormer, forcing himself to speak, "that there was an accident in one of these squares some time ago?"

"There was a melancholy accident on that first-floor about a year ago, and I am still suffering from its effects," said Penguin, gravely. "A cousin of mine, who owed me his fortune, fell in love with his laundress's daughter. That did not matter, you'll say. But he married her, and I shall have none of the money."

"The story I meant was of a man falling from a housetop, and being killed. Perhaps I mistake the place."

"No, you don't," said the Sergeant, "but the affair had been driven out of my head by the much more serious accident I have related. Here, come this way. Do you see those two windows behind the parapet. The man—a tiler, or something in that line—came down from the front of one of these windows—that one, I fancy, to the left. I remember it perfectly, for I happened to be taking my walks abroad, just as I am doing now, and I saw the body."

"You saw the body?"

"Certainly. I saw it taken away under the charge of a medical gentleman of this neighborhood, who may now be a reformed and virtuous character, for aught I know, because I have never seen or heard of him since, but who was then regarded as something of a very different sort—perhaps unjustly—who knows?"

"Do you happen to remember his name?"

"Yes, as you ask it. Otherwise I should ask whether it is likely I should recollect the name at this distance of time and among the thousands, I might say millions—there is no extra charge for saying millions—that come under my eye. His name was, or is—he may have been hanged, but I have not heard of it—Benjamin Dudley, and his residence was in Lancaster Street, a place which I will bet you don't know."

"I do."

"'What, will the aspiring bloods of Lancaster Street' aspire to such acquaintance as you!"

"Let us go into those gardens."

"I am with you," said Penguin:

"Come walk in our garden, so large and so fine,
You may, for our Benchers give leave—
Moreover, if ever you stop here to dine,
Uncommon fine port you shall have."

The never-failing spirits and the equally faithful memory of Sergeant Penguin might have been supposed to have been terribly distasteful to his companion. Perhaps, had his trouble been of an ordinary kind, the usual irritating effect of such antagonism might have been produced in Ernest Dormer. But to-day he was not annoyed—outraged—he scarcely heeded the learned Sergeant's rattle, but he derived a strange satisfaction from finding himself in converse with a man whose nature was in the most healthy and unfeeling good order.

"Penguin," said Ernest, when they, and a few nurse-maids with their children, were the only occupants of the old garden, "you are a cool lawyer."

"I should be a cooler one, if you'd come over to this bench, out of the sun."

"As you will. You are also a man of the world."

"Well do I recognize that favorite exordium of a man who has not been satisfied with the world, but has also obeyed the flesh and the devil. Go on, my dear penitent."

"It is no such case. I want your advice, however."

"It must be a curious case in which Mr. Ernest Dormer is not ready to act upon his own instinct, with a very good chance of acting rightly. That is not a compliment, it is a remark on a fact in natural history."

"There are cases in which the most self-reliant man—and I am not he—is the better for an adviser. Will you let me ask you a question or two before I go further?"

"Of course; and if my answers make you decide not to consult me I shall not be offended."

That also was a speech which satisfied Ernest Dormer. He wanted a man who was so perfectly uninterested in him. From Latrobe—or from Mangles until yesterday—the reply would have been a rudeness.

"That unfortunate man who fell from the parapet—"

"Good Heaven!" said Penguin, fairly astounded, "what can the fate of such a creature be to you or any body else but his easily consoled widow?"

"You promised to answer—"

"True, and I question. 'I am dumb. Pronounce.'"

"You said that he was killed. Are you sure of that?"

"If not, they treated him very unkindly, for

they buried him. I know that, for I was ass enough to promise a sovereign to his family, and it was speedily claimed for the funeral. To be sure, he may have recovered, and I may have been cheated—the lower orders have pleasant ways of their own."

"The point is this. Was he dead when the man Dudley took him away?"

"Now you remind me of it, I believe he was not. I recollect that Dudley told me that the case was hopeless, but that the poor fellow might be taken to the surgery, the reason for which apparently illogical proceeding was that Dudley got a sort of advertisement by being mixed up with the matter—the reporters would mention his name. You look ill, Dormer, is it too hot for you? We can go into the Hall or to some man's chambers if you are unwell," said the good-natured Sergeant. "'You are too much i' the sun,' where you sit."

"Thanks. I am well. There was an inquest, of course?"

"I suppose so. The coroners look after their fees."

"The verdict would be Accidental Death."

"There is just a chance that it was not, because that would be the rational verdict, and the jury was a coroner's. But I think I remember that they went right. In fact, had there been any other finding, one would have noticed it."

"You have no doubt that the man died by an accident?"

"You put a doubt into my head—or rather you suggest one, and it is the first time I ever gave it a thought. Accident, of course. The fellow saw a window open, and endeavored to improve his worldly condition by annexing something or other, but the Nemesis came upon him in the shape of a slip, and he became a warning to unrighteous tilers."

"Yes," said Ernest, "that is a very natural solution."

"The only one, unless you are inclined to believe that it suddenly occurred to him that he had done tiling enough in this world, and so he 'jumped the life to come,' as Hamlet says."

"I do not suppose that. But, Penguin, was there never any suggestion that he fell neither by accident nor by his own will?"

"Thrown down by somebody else?"

"Yes," said Dormer in a low voice, anxiously.

"Quarreled with another fellow of his craft, and got pitched over. Well, such things happen—certainly—but—no, no," said the Sergeant, recalling the scene, "he had no companion. He was not at his lawful work—that was in the further corner of the Square. He had strayed on a tour of inspection."

"Yes," said Dormer. "But who was—"

The words choked him, but he was resolute.

"Who was in the chambers from which he fell?" said Ernest, distinctly.

Sergeant Penguin looked round at him with interest. The lawyer had read too many cases in what he called the Mare's Nest Precedents to listen very indulgently to suggestions of the kind to which Dormer's question seemed likely to belong, but still he liked any thing in the nature of suspicion, which he always considered a step in the right direction.

"Ah!" he said. "Somebody has been amusing himself with a romance. Some club man, at the expense of our friend from the country. There was nobody in the chambers, Dormer. They were locked up, and the tenant was in the country. I may add, in another sense, that he is not so now."

"His name was Percy Vaughan, was it not?"

"Are you avized of that? Yes, that was his name, and your informant the romancer has taken the trouble to get up the local coloring."

"You know that he left the country?"

"Yes, and I know why, though a very good fellow, an acquaintance of mine, and I regret to add, a Papist, took much pains to conceal the reason."

"What was it?" asked Ernest.

"It may be understood by the light of a poem I learned in boyhood.

'Peter Quill, the scrivener,
Whose dad in Chancery pleads,
Was sent one day to Botany Bay,
For forging title deeds.'"

"Forgery?"

"So a bird of the air informed me, and birds are wise as well as merry. But I say, my good Dormer. To be sure. Ha! Omitting other exclamations, which may come in later, I see. The story which your imaginative friend has tried to put upon you is that Mr. Percy Vaughan slew this poor tiler, by throwing him from the battlements, and then escaped beyond seas. Romance in Gray's Inn. That is not altogether a bad story."

"Suppose it were, if not altogether a true one, partly true? That it *was* a murder?" said Ernest Dormer.

"Well," laughed the Sergeant, "it would be very interesting. I don't exactly see how it could be made a murder, unless you proved that Mr. Vaughan lured the tiler into his chamber for the purpose of killing him. For that piece of deliberate and artful craft you would want a motive, and what motive there could be for a gentleman's malice against an artisan of the tiler persuasion I own I don't perceive. What device does your friend employ to get in the malice?"

Ernest Dormer was silent.

"Ah!" said the Sergeant, after a pause, "I thought so. That trifling ingredient called a motive is forgotten, as is common enough. Is your informant some particular friend of Mr. Vaughan—and is it wished to elevate that missing gentleman from the sordid ranks of the forgers to the melancholy dignity of the murderers? He must make out a better pedigree—this savoreth of the *gallus* and the *taurus*, amiable and excellent animals, but not good supporters for the coat of arms prayed for."

But it was not in listening to Sergeant Pen-

guin's talk that Ernest Dormer was passing his moments of silence. He was finally debating with himself whether his mind were clear enough, after the stunning blow of that day, to justify him in deciding on telling all to Penguin. Mingled motives seemed to cross and jostle within him. He remembered the warning which he had received from Mangles. He felt instinctively that Dudley was a scoundrel, even without taking into account his object, which was extortion of money as the price of a secret. But there came over him the thought that some things had been concealed from him at Naybury. He had never been told of the rescue by Vaughan until it became impossible to conceal the story, and though at the moment he had accepted the explanation it now seemed to him a poor one. Had there really been love-passages between Magdalen and Vaughan? The locket—he had seen that—held it in his hand, and there was the affectionate inscription. Those words might only mean gratitude, but they were capable of a much warmer interpretation. And she had visited Vaughan—that she had owned. Alone?

He had never asked her that. He had never thought of asking it. It had not occurred to him as possible.

But what was he to do? To ask her the question?

Yes, if such a question could be asked without bringing in others, and so drawing out the whole black and miserable story. Yes, he could go down to Naybury, dissemble for a few hours, and when Magdalen should be off her guard he could introduce the question carelessly, and seize the reply.

No. He could not do that. He could not look in that girl's face, and watch it until he should entrap her, even if she had deserved the worst he could do. He thought of her head upon his bosom, and he recoiled at the thought of the tones which his voice would take when he put the treacherous question.

He could write it, and that would be more fair. It would be giving her warning that he had heard that which, if true, must separate them forever. If she had an answer it would give her time to prepare it—this was giving her fair play; even a wife who deceives you has a right to this.

But then two days must pass before the answer came. And this delay was simply intolerable.

Then the devil put into Ernest Dormer's mind a thought which was worthy of the author.

Perhaps Desdemona would never have been murdered but for the working of one thought kindred to that which possessed Dormer. In the moment of a father's bitter exasperation he warns the husband that the daughter had deceived her parent, and might so deal with her spouse. That was the weapon, skillfully used by the enemy, which slew Desdemona.

But what came to Ernest Dormer was this: *They were strangely ready with their consent to my marriage.* They knew little of me, made few inquiries, and the courtship was very brief. Others may have known what has been told to me. And Mangles owns that there was scandal.

The hot blood rushed to the face of Ernest Dormer.

He told the lawyer all.

The Sergeant's rollicking manner and facile quotations were all banished in a few moments from the time when he found that Ernest Dormer had serious matters to tell. It was not that the lawyer was much interested in his companion, or that he was in the least shocked at any thing that had been laid before him. Had the case been proved, with all of guilt or shame that could be imported into it, Sergeant Penguin was far too true an artist in his own line to let the truth make any difference in the mode in which he regarded the parties concerned. But he was good-natured, and he had a keen sense of the fitness of things. After Dormer had intimated that he was going to give Penguin his confidence, the latter adopted a gravity which, nevertheless, he sedulously preserved from any expression of concern. He treated the business solely as business, and this was the way in which Dormer at that time believed that he wished it treated.

"I have heard you through, and I have scarcely interrupted you," the Sergeant said, "for your narrative has been clearly told. You will not expect me to give you any counsel of importance until I have had time to think over what I have heard. Forgive my saying that I recognize, in your having confided all this to me, a proof that your pride and not your affections will be wounded should the case be to any extent made out. That, however, is my business only so far as it shows me that you will be very reasonable and prudent in all that you may do under my advice."

"I never felt less inclined to be either."

"That also I understand. Remember that this interview was the result of accident, and that though I am honored in being thought worthy of your confidence, I advise you only as a surgeon might do who should be called in because he passed at the moment of a casualty. You shall be served to the best of my ability, but you will not expect much allowance for mere personal feelings."

"You could not have put yourself in a position more acceptable to me," said Ernest Dormer.

"And you authorize me to sift the story in my own way, should it occur to me (I don't say that it will) that I have any private means of doing so?"

"Gladly."

"I will speak very plainly to you, Dormer," said the Sergeant. "We have not seen much of one another, and club-hours are not my hours. But few folks live entirely in the dark, and I am not without knowledge of the doings of a good many persons who think that I know or care nothing about them. I am not ignorant that up to a very late date before your marriage

your domestic arrangements were—well, like those of many other bachelors, and that you were not thought to be a marrying man. I was glad to hear that you had settled, as I like to know that a good fellow, whether my intimate friend or not, meets with good fortune. I am not clear that you bid for domestic happiness, and if you do not secure it, therefore, I am not to suppose that you will be much disappointed."

"I took things as they came," said Ernest Dormer, who hardly knew what sort of answer to make to a speech which was not of a very encouraging character.

"You did wisely, I make no doubt. Now do not undo any good you may have done for yourself by incautious and impatient action at the present time."

"I must do something, and instantly."

"Pardon me if I say that you must not. That is, if you elect to remain in my hands. I repeat what I said about your confidence. I should not have been offended if you had withheld it. I shall not be offended if you desire me not to think any more of the matter, and I dare say that I shall be able to obey you, or nearly so. But if I am to help you in investigating this story I stipulate that you do nothing without my consent, and that above all you give no person at Naybury the slightest reason to suppose that you have heard any thing."

"Good God! do you mean that I am to carry this horrible story home, and nurse it until you give the signal?"

"If it be necessary for you to go home certainly I make that compact."

"I could not keep it for an hour there."

"I expected that reply. But is it necessary for you to go to Naybury?"

"Not necessary, at the moment, of course; but—"

"Then stay away."

"I must account for my absence. No, not that, but I must write letters—a letter—how can I do that?"

"I see," said Penguin. "You are in the habit of writing such letters as young wives expect to receive from young husbands. You feel that you can not add another, in that tone, to the series you have dispatched. I advise you to do so."

"I can not and will not."

"Already you are rejecting my advice. And I told you that I should pay small regard to personal feelings."

"There are some things which it is impossible for a man to do. Yesterday might as easily come back again as the spirit in which I sent off its letter to Naybury."

"It would be too much in your present state of mind, Dormer, to ask you what your own belief is in regard to the story you have been telling me. In fact, I would rather you had no belief at all, or at all events that you did not put it into words, because words bind us to obstinacy—fools that we are. But if we blow the story into atoms will it be pleasant to you to recollect that it had your credence to such an extent that before you tested it you changed your manner to your wife?"

"I can not make you feel as I do, but give me credit for feeling like a gentleman."

"But I would rather see you act like one. No gentleman that I ever heard of convicts an unheard lady of doing wrong. I don't call Claudio a gentleman."

"He was not."

"I will not say *mutato nomine, de te*—but I recommend you not to do that which you may deeply repent. You called me a man of the world. Show yourself one. A very short time will enable us to decide what ought to be done. At present I say, emphatically, you must do nothing."

"If I do not communicate with Naybury the next post will force me to do so."

"And that is why I recommend your writing. But I see you will not do it. Then do this. The telegraph demands nothing but words of business—nothing to go against the grain. Have you no friend who is ill in Belgium?"

"Do you think I will go away until I have cleared this up? Then, perhaps, I may go away forever."

"Who asked you to go away? On the contrary, I wish for your presence. There is a bedroom in my chambers in the Temple; you shall have that, and then you will be in hiding and at hand."

"In hiding, yes."

"Well, is it the first time in your life? If so, you have been luckier than most men who have fought their way up—much luckier than myself, for instance."

"No, I won't go to the Temple, thank you, Penguin. But I will send you an address that will bring me at once to you. Can I not see you again to-night?"

"Assuredly not. Perhaps not to-morrow. But send the address. And, Ernest Dormer, one word. I have told you that I know some things. Mind that the address you send me is one which you will not be sorry to have sent when you reconsider."

"I do not understand you."

And this was true enough. What was passing through the cool head of Penguin had not entered the excited brain of Dormer.

"If not, so much the better. But remember what I say. And that you may be the more disposed to obey my wishes, I will depart from my intention to the extent of telling you that so far as I can yet make up my mind I can see nothing but a lie in all that Mr. Dudley has told you."

"A lie."

"A foul plot, sustained by lying."

"It is not for me to try to disturb that opinion."

"No. But is it not yours?"

"I swear that I would give my right hand to be able to say that it is."

"And yet he does not love his wife," said the Sergeant, after he had parted from Dormer.

"But that is no business of mine. Only, my dear Mr. Dudley, I think I see my way to make *your* life pleasant whether there is any thing in your story or not."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TWO LAWYERS.

It was Mr. Sergeant Penguin's way to try to be a little—if ever so little—ahead of other people. To his prudence for being, as he said, one step in advance, he owed much of his success in the world. If one person with whom he came into contact knew three facts, Sergeant Penguin managed to know four. If it was important for other persons to be punctual to twelve o'clock, Sergeant Penguin was at the rendezvous at a quarter to twelve. If the right and expected subscription were five pounds, Sergeant Penguin gave five guineas. In small matters and great he found this little rule exceedingly valuable. But he never professed to have a rule. On the contrary, all his advantages were gained, he said, by some accident, and he affected saunter, mental as well as physical, when he was most keenly alive to the work in hand.

To-day he thought that he should like to know something more about Mr. Percy Vaughan.

So, when Ernest Dormer had departed, Mr. Sergeant Penguin quietly lounged across the Square, and again inspected the inscriptions in the doorway of the house whence Andrew Barton had fallen. Again. For it may be remembered that when the disaster had occurred, and after the body of Barton had been removed, the Sergeant had carefully read these names, with the aid of his gold eye-glass, and had annotated them as he read up.

"Vaughan's name, top-floor, obliterated, of course? Yes, and a new man there, Mr. Blagrove—who's he? Wimperley and Blamper at the bottom. Orbit and Wheeler engineering as before—ought to have found out perpetual motion by this time. Gerald Kildare, he was a rising man, doesn't seem to have risen, though—never hear of him. Third-floor—let's see, I don't know the name. Swear it wasn't there when I looked last. Ladbrook. Couldn't have forgotten it, because it is the name of somebody who ought to have changed it for Penguin, but did not see her way. Don't believe there was any body on the third-floor. Wasn't it here that some man lived with his family until he found it wouldn't do? I fancy so. Well, now for five words with my friend the Papist."

Mr. Haslop's pleasant room was as pleasant as ever, and a little richer by the addition of more cups, china, and cabinets, selected with the owner's cultivated taste, and adorning the apartment, not choking it up into the likeness of a dealer's wareroom. Mr. Haslop was in, and of course at home to the eminent advocate.

"Haslop, how do you do? Am I disturbing you much?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Haslop, making a red ink mark on a vast document, a history of the title to a Welsh estate just valuable enough to pay the costs of the litigation occasioned by its late owner's having saved the price of a good will by making a bad one out of his own wooden head. "I am glad to see you. I am always glad to see you, as you know."

It was true, though two men could hardly be more unlike, on all points, from general character down to personal habits. The last fact was illustrated by Mr. Haslop's carefully wiping the red ink from his pen before laying it down, and by Sergeant Penguin's remark, on noticing the tidiness:

"What a cleanly fellow you are! I sit, like Saturn, in a ring that goes round my chair, only my ring is made of ink-splashes."

"A pen yawns so if you do not wipe it," said Mr. Haslop, simply. "You look hot. I suppose it is hot out of doors. Will you have a bottle of iced seltzer water and something in it, and what?"

"Do you know that I thought you would say that, so I resolved to come in and let you say it. For it is awfully hot."

The Protestant clerk was very ready, and the hissing draught, served in no vulgar tumbler, but in a very long and beautifully cut glass goblet, promptly cooled the throat of the advocate.

"Bless you," said Sergeant Penguin, "if you care for a heretic's blessing."

"I am not taught that it will do me much harm," said Mr. Haslop, smiling, and pushing a little tray toward Penguin that he might not set down the moist glass upon a beautifully inlaid table at which his eye was directed.

"I don't mean to say that I came only for that," said Penguin, "for if I did you would not believe me."

"A very good reason for not saying it."

"I don't know a better. The fact is—by-the-way, is that door shut?"

"A double door."

"And the excellent youth, Ganymede, is not listening?"

"Why should he listen?"

"I don't know. My clerk has orders to listen when I give him the hint, so that he may come in and interrupt a consultation at the right minute."

"And when is that?"

"When I have not had time to read the brief, and the solicitor begins to ask me questions which may lead him to discover the fact. Then Mr. Horsham, who knows exactly, from my voice and language, when I am getting into a hole, comes bustling in, and has a most important and pressing thing to say to me."

"And then?"

"Then I am delivered, and I am obliged to go away, and we have another consultation, for which I am prepared—perhaps."

"You see that I am not so guarded," said Mr. Haslop, opening the door, and showing that the second was closed. "And as you seem to wish for it—there—" and he drew a bolt.

"That's best. See here, Haslop. It is on the cards that I may be able to serve—or at all events to prevent injury to a person in whom you take a great interest, and I need not say that nothing would gratify me more than being able to do so. I am not a man of much profession, but I don't forget your kindness at the time of that row with the Benchers."

"I forget the affair, but I will remember it if you wish to be quit of an obligation. I know of none. I did what I thought my duty."

"More than nine men out of ten would have done in the circumstances, for you made yourself three enemies."

"They have not hurt me, that I know of."

"I dare say not. One's enemies never do. It is one's friends that make life so troublesome. However, you served me much, let me serve you a little if I can. That young lady, who was a sort of ward, or something, of yours, wasn't she?"

Penguin knew quite well that she was not, and he had no reason for putting a question—it was simply his habit.

"You mean, of course, Miss Conway—now Mrs. Dormer."

"As you say, *now* Mrs. Dormer."

"She was not my ward, but I had reasons for being very much interested in her. You have no bad news about her, I trust?"

"Not exactly bad news, but I have heard something which I have thought you ought to know. You were at the wedding, of course?"

"No, to the great grief of my younger daughter, who was to have been a bridemaid. We had a family affliction, and at the last minute had to give up the pleasure of being present, and they had to find another bridemaid."

"Ah! I wanted you to tell me something about Dormer, and what you thought of him."

"But you know him better than I do."

"I see him once in two months, and then we talk politics. Your young ladies correspond with his wife, no doubt, and there's no way of getting at a man's character like that."

"They have not corresponded much since the marriage. You are not going to tell me that Dormer is not behaving well to her?"

"No, certainly not. The better way to put it would be to say that I am not quite sure that she is behaving wisely to him."

"I believe her to be one of the best creatures living."

"And I have no right to believe any thing else. But the best of us are not always the wisest. Now Mrs. Dormer is your favorite, while I have never even seen her. Don't be vexed if I suggest any thing that you dislike to hear, but be sure I speak out of the desire I have explained to you."

"We are not very new friends, Penguin."

"No, by Jove! *Labuntur anni*, and all that. Then I will speak plainly, and you will consider that I have approached a delicate matter with the proper circumlocution. You know that Mr. Dormer was not Miss Conway's first lover."

"I know that he was not the first person who loved Miss Conway."

"Just so. I see, of course, the difference you would imply. You mean that he was the first person whom she liked."

"I have reason to think so."

"If I were to say I have reason to think otherwise, should you be vexed?"

"Much more than vexed, if you could prove it; but I don't believe you can. Prove it, I mean, of course, to my moral sense."

"But take it for granted, for my purpose."

"Only so, then."

"That will do. Suppose that Miss Conway had really cared a great deal about somebody else, or, at all events, had made him think that she did. There would be no harm in this, of course; it happens in almost every handsome girl's life. But if the fact that she had been liked by somebody else than the man she married had been kept from him, and if it had been revealed to him, with some strange circumstances, by an accident, and that out of some of those circumstances persons were trying to make mischief?"

"If you knew Magdalen Conway, you would say—or, I think of more consequence, if her husband knows her, he would tell you—that it is impossible for the old serpent himself to make mischief out of any passage in her life."

"I am very sorry to be obliged to think that it is not impossible. But I don't want to be mysterious with you, Haslop, and if I do not say every thing that is in my mind it is because I am bound—for a short time—to a certain reticence. You did a very kind turn to a young man who came to grief for playing with this kind of edge tool," said Sergeant Penguin, somewhat abruptly, and touching an old parchment deed on Haslop's desk.

"Yes," said Haslop, quietly. He was not easily surprised.

"You sent him out of England."

"I lent him some money, and he left England."

"I must not ask why?"

"Why he left? You have just shown that you know."

"I meant why you helped him. No, I ought not to ask that. But, as gossiping women say, put two and two together."

"The sum they make is that you connect, in some way, the history of this young man with that of Miss Conway. You are right in doing so. If those histories had not connected themselves I should have saved rather a large sum of money, which I gave him out of that cabinet."

"Setting aside the one thing, into which he may have been tempted by circumstances which are often too strong for many highly religious elderly men of business, and which may more easily overcome a young man, especially if in love, was he a bad fellow?"

"My impression of him was favorable."

"Was he capable—pardon this cross-questioning; I am really giving you what informa-

tion I may—was he capable of availing himself of a lady's condescension, or favor, or gratitude, or what you like, to her injury?"

"Why did you use the word gratitude?" said Haslop, who watched and weighed every word.

"To show you that I know something of the matter."

This was not so. It was a slip.

"If you know what fully justifies the word you have some key to a part of the man's character."

"A brave fellow. Yes, if his own account may be taken."

"I have other evidence than his own. I have that of Miss Conway herself."

"Just now it is not my business to lessen its value. Suppose all happened as Miss Conway supposed, and the gentleman's gallantry is beyond dispute. You have nothing to say against him?"

"You know, or if you do not, there is no harm in my telling you, that Percy Vaughan—we have not named him, but we may as well—that Percy Vaughan thought himself entitled to make Miss Conway an offer."

"I did not know that he had gone so far. He was refused?"

"He was refused."

"And he considered himself wronged?"

"He had no right to do so."

"Precisely, from your point of view of the lady's character, and I make no doubt that you know it well. But if—in the plainest words—she should have given him more encouragement than you or I know of?"

"She is incapable of any thing uncandid or coquettish."

"Which should you call a young lady who visited, in his chambers, a man who had made her an offer?"

"You have heard that!" said Mr. Haslop, with visible agitation.

"I don't ask you whether it is true. I only tell you that the story either has been told, or will be told, to her husband."

"You think that she herself has not told him."

"Yes," said Sergeant Penguin, not speaking the truth, but justifying the deceit to himself on the ground that he was doing his best in the interest of Ernest Dormer.

"Then, Penguin, excuse my being as plain with you as you are with me. The source whence you have obtained your knowledge must be a very bad one indeed."

"It is so. Many things come to me from such sources, but this is one of the very worst. That is my chief reason for coming to you."

"Have you more to tell or to hint?"

"I think not to-day. Mind, I hold my tongue with the utmost reluctance, for which you must give me credit, and the moment I am released from an undertaking to be silent on some other matters they shall be yours. I am, in fact, to a great extent, breaking that compact now, but in some things a man is a law to himself, and I have chosen to do it."

"One word more. Is there any unhappiness between Mr. and Mrs. Dormer?" asked Haslop, anxiously.

"I have a right to say that there is none—yet."

"And you have the means of averting it?"

"That is a home-question, but I will answer it. I mean to try, but I know not whether I shall succeed."

Haslop took out a check-book, signed a blank check, and handed it, without a word, to his companion.

"That is business," said Penguin, "but I do not think this is the weapon."

"Then the motive is revenge?" said Haslop, sharply.

"It may be. I can not say."

"You will not. I have a right to point out this to you, Penguin. You have a sincere wish to serve me. There is no service in your power which I should value so highly as the salvation of Magdalen Dormer's happiness. You know best how far you can dispense with scruples and give me a full confidence, and how far you can owe any loyalty to such persons as those must be who seek to wreck that happiness."

"My dear Haslop, I have very few scruples, and if my information came to me direct from the sources you describe as they deserve I would have no more consideration for them than for the feelings of the next witness I may have to worry over a thief's alibi. But it does not. I will tell you one thing, however, which may allay some of your anxiety. No harm will come from the delay in my telling you all."

"You can not insure that. Where is Mr. Dormer?" asked Haslop.

"I do not know."

"It must be my business to know," said Mr. Haslop, "and that instantly."

"I told you that there was no unhappiness between him and his wife," said Penguin, speaking that he might have time to think.

"Not yet, you said. And such a thing is not to be left to the chance of a rascally person's keeping faith with you. Why should he or she do that?"

"Because it would spoil his or her game to break it. Do me the justice to believe that I know what I am about, Haslop."

"My dear fellow, I have every confidence in your sincerity and in your skill—what need to say that? But the moment you have affected me with knowledge, as we say, that a bad thing is in contemplation I cease to be a free agent. I mean that I am as much bound to interfere as you are. And therefore I want you to enable me to interfere with effect."

"See," said the Sergeant, "you are not, forgive me, treating me as candidly as I am treating you. I have told you all I was at liberty to tell, and more; but you, who are not, so far as I know, bound to any secrecy, will not even say whether it is true that Miss Conway visited this man in his rooms."

"I did not deny it. I know that it is true."

"But not alone?"

"Alone."

"Well," said Sergeant Penguin, with a slight shrug, "if Mr. Dormer were my client I am afraid I know what I should say to him. I need not say it to you as a man of the world."

"I understand you, of course," said Mr. Haslop; "and whether you are good enough to believe me or not, I tell you this, that it is precisely because I am something better than a man of the world that I believe I could convince you that you would give wrong advice to that gentleman."

"We are not advocates now, Haslop, we are speaking as friends."

"You mean that I am arguing in Mr. Dormer's interest. As I stand before you, Penguin," said Mr. Haslop, rising, and laying his hand—it may have been accidentally—on a large old volume near him, "if I were not as certain that Mrs. Dormer is the best of women as I am that we are speaking together, I would simply thank you for coming to me to-day, and tell you that I seldom meddle in the family affairs of other people. But take this from me, and do not set it down to any infatuation about the lady, who has not any claim of wardship, long acquaintance, or fellow-belief with me, that no spot or stain rests upon her character, and that she is as incapable of wrong as a human being can be."

Haslop's noble face flushed and his eyes sparkled as he bore this emphatic testimony. The advocate listened with evident respect. It was not in the least like the adjurations which he was in the habit of making or deriding for a consideration.

"I believe you implicitly," he said. "But others may not know the faith which should be placed in your judgment."

"Others," exclaimed Haslop. "There can be but one person entitled to hear such a testimony, and I see how. Mr. Dormer is your client. Yes, and your other words are reconcilable with the fact. You say there is no unhappiness yet. For God's sake, my friend, let there be none. He is consulting you. Bring him to me."

The instincts of the nobler nature had been quickened by affection, and had broken through the guard of the man who was but half in earnest. These things will happen sometimes, distasteful as they are to intellectual pride. To do Penguin justice, he accepted the situation frankly.

"I am convinced," he said, "that in trusting you I am doing my best for all concerned. I will tell you what has been told to me."

They talked long and earnestly. It need not be said that Sergeant Penguin was ready with a merciless analysis of the entire story, and with a full exposition of the character of the person who was bringing it forward. That he tore it to tatters, on the evidence before him, if evidence it could be called, it is equally needless to say. But that was the least part of the business, at least for Haslop. He scarcely listened with patience to the comments of the other lawyer, and incessantly waved away the tale and the argument as if unworthy of the consideration that was being given to an improbable and shameful fiction. The dominant thought in his mind was in regard to the relations between Magdalen and her husband. The grief which he expressed was not that a beautiful and innocent girl should be made the mark for a black-hearted intriguer, but that Ernest Dormer should have been forced into the lending an ear to such villainy. The evil, Haslop feared, was wrought. The husband had left his home and had refused to return. It was much, no doubt, that he had yielded to the urgent demand of the Sergeant, and had in no overt manner broken the bond; but even if the story were demolished to its last rag, and those who had contrived it were abjectly seeking mercy at Dormer's hands, there would still be the seeds of an inevitable sorrow. There would be something that Ernest ought to forget, but would not; there would be something that Magdalen would forgive, but ought not. The former point Penguin admitted, for he knew several sides of human nature. The latter he did not understand, holding the Philistine doctrine that while a man behaves reasonably well to his wife she has no right to memory of the past or fear for the future. But he was at one with Haslop upon the necessity of instantly bringing Dormer to conviction that he had been played upon.

As they came out, having arranged for an immediate meeting with Ernest, a couple of pretty girls emerged from a little room near that of the clerk.

"At last, papa," said one, smiling.

"An hour and a quarter," said the other. "Is not that a nice time to keep ladies waiting, Sir?"

"My dear children, I had utterly forgotten my appointment with you. I was closeted with that gentleman. Sergeant Penguin—my daughters."

"It is some years since I had the pleasure of seeing these young ladies," said the Sergeant, bowing most politely; "but I remember that one of them—I had rather not know which—called me a dreadful old fright then, and I dare not think I have grown more worthy of her admiration."

Both laughed, and the younger said:

"We are wiser now, Sergeant Penguin, than to judge persons by externals."

"I don't seem to get much of a compliment out of that either," said the Sergeant, "but 'sufferance is the badge of all our tribe!'"

"And whom do you think we have seen, papa?" said the elder. "You won't guess. Maggie's husband. He was walking along by himself, and looking so melancholy, at least we thought so."

"Melancholy—nonsense, child! It is a very hot day, and I suppose he was very hot also."

"If she is in town, and has not let us know,

I will give it her," said the other Miss Haslop.

Neither of the men looked at the other, nor was it necessary. But when the Sergeant had handed the ladies into the carriage and he had left them he said to himself:

"I have done for the best, I believe. And if he quarrels with me I do not know that I care. Besides, these girls saw him, and told their father that he was in town—Haslop can't deny that. I am going to take a great deal of trouble about a thing that does not in the least concern me. What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba? Moreover, I suspect that we are going to do no good, and that things will tend unto a dismal fatal end. Haslop was in a desperate hurry to get rid of the story, but I suspect we have not heard all about it. They have some evidence in reserve, or they are fools as well as scoundrels. But we'll have it out, if it be dragged from them with cart-ropes, as Fabian says."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A REPORT FROM THE CLUB.

Mr. Mangles was not given to habitual discomposure, but he had been very much annoyed at the interview between himself and Ernest Dormer. The latter did him some wrong in declaring in bitterness that the only thing Mangles would have done for him would have been giving him advice to go abroad, with an appointment as special correspondent for the *Vivisector*. Samuel Mangles would have done a great deal more. He was not inclined, as we have found, to go where he did not see his way clear before him; but when a straightforward service could be rendered to a friend Mangles was as energetic and as open-handed an ally as could be desired. He would have been exceedingly glad to have been employed by Dormer in the affair with Farquhar (as it was expected to be), and it is probable that he would have conducted it with much skill. But he had been thrown over, as he said, and he hardly knew how Dormer might receive any further offer of service.

He had lost no time in seeking Henry Wigram, and in demanding that gentleman's consent or refusal to let his name be known by Dormer as that of the person who had first talked lightly of Mrs. Dormer.

Wigram, in accordance with his promise, sent him the following note:

"Dear Mangles,—You are at liberty to make any use of my name in reference to the topic on which we spoke last night.

"But if you take my advice, and for the present refrain from any conversation with your friend upon that subject, you will be acting with more consideration than you are aware of.

"Yours truly, Henry Wigram.

"*The Octagon.*"

"I should like to know what he means by that," said Mr. Mangles, throwing the note upon his table.

"By what?" said Mr. Pruth, who was busy with his contributors.

"I forgot that I was speaking aloud," said Mangles. "I don't know that you care to be bothered with this affair of Dormer's, but you have heard so much that you are bound to hear all."

"But I am interested in it now," said Mr. Pruth. "I was not until he came here."

"I think I know what touched you, you soft-hearted old goose," said his chief. "You were quite pleased with the way he made amends for what you took to be a sort of rudeness."

"Yes," said Pruth, "it showed that he had a good heart."

"It didn't. It only showed that he was a gentleman."

"That means the same thing with me, you know, Mangles," said Mr. Pruth, smiling.

"I've no objection, only don't let your confusion of ideas get into the paper," laughed Mangles, "or we shall be attacked for goody-goodyism, and we can't afford that, you know. Just read this note. You heard what it refers to. It is from the man whose name Dormer demanded and I promised."

"I echo what you said just now. What does he mean?" said Mr. Pruth, after glancing over Wigram's note.

"That Dormer is in a state of irritation, in which any allusion to the business would be unfriendly, I suppose."

"No, I don't read it so."

"What's your gloss, then, Pruth?"

"It looks as if the writer knew that something more serious had taken place, or would take place."

"Hang it, I did not see that. Nor do I."

"Well, it does not much matter, because you have his consent to do as you like. If Dormer comes here I suppose you will simply hand him that note?"

"I am not so sure. Taking your hypothesis, Pruth, it seems to me that my friend Mr. Wigram must have some queer acquaintances. It was certainly he who first hinted that it might not be unfriendly to warn Dormer that things had been said. Then again it has always been he who under pretense of much concern about Dormer has contrived to make it clear that he did not expect matters to turn out well. Thirdly, he was very mysterious when I told him to write to me, and say whether I might use his name, and he hinted at another alternative which might satisfy me as well—eh, what?"

"That might mean that he would save you any unpleasantness by writing direct to Dormer, and avowing himself the author of the reports."

"That is a chivalrous idea, and worthy of you, Pruth, and of some other men whom I have known, Wigram's betters; but if you knew him you would be reasonably clear that such was not his meaning. No—I add a fourthly to my list of proofs, and here I find evidence—yes, Pruth, I

believe that your honest instinct has hit upon the right scent, not for the first time, Mr. Sub-editor—evidence that Wigram is aware that something is going on between Dormer and other parties. If I can prove that, Wigram shall have a large piece of my mind."

"You have heard no more from Dormer?"

"I doubt whether I shall hear again, except perhaps that he will write and ask for this gentleman's name."

"I think you will."

"So much the better; for he is a good fellow, and a good contributor," said the editor. "How does the paper stand?"

"We are rather behind, but I suppose that several things will come in to-day. It is awkward that Norman and Derwent both take holiday together, and that Dormer is also out of harness."

"Never mind. Between ourselves it looks well to be dull at this time of the year, it shows that we are written by gentlemen who go out of town like gentlemen."

"That would sound better at the club than it would to a man who had bought the paper, Mr. Mangles."

Mr. James Rydon's card was brought in.

"Jemmy Rydon," said Mangles, in astonishment. "What does he want? Not an engagement, I should imagine. Show him in immediately."

Good-natured Jemmy Rydon entered.

"You'll be surprised to see me, Sam," he said, "and I hope I'm not disturbing important business."

"Not a bit. Very glad to see you. Mr. Pruth, my friend and assistant."

"I want to say ten words to you about a man whom we both like, and who, if all is true that one hears, may be going—" Rydon sank his voice —"to come to grief."

"Is it Ernest Dormer?" said Mangles, aloud.

Rydon nodded.

"Several of us are thinking about him, James, and perhaps more people care about him than he believes. You may speak before Mr. Pruth, who is aware of every thing that may be going on, and who is a warm friend of Dormer's."

"Very well," said Rydon, "then I will tell you what. I'm not a clever fellow, you know, and you might as well ask me to jump out of window as to write this," he said, taking up a strip of printed matter; "but I like clever fellows and I honor their brains; and besides, I like Ernest Dormer, and so do you."

"Well, James, after all these apologies for wanting to do a kind thing, go on."

"I don't know that it's kind—in fact, I don't know that I am going to do any thing at all. But I had last night what the women call a word of a sort with another fellow, Mr. Henry Wigram by name. He is a friend of yours, too, I know."

"Not much."

"You are always talking to him. I have seen you sit by him for an hour, and speak confidentially."

"Never mind that—perhaps he amuses me—but don't let that interfere with your telling me what you said to him. I really don't care about him."

"Then I may as well say that last night Master Henry got a little screwed—not much, you understand, but enough to make him bumptious and a bit spiteful. He abused the waiters, which is not usual with him, for he pretends to be incapable of getting excited; but last night he was very hard on them, especially Walter, who is a very good servant, considering that he came from an hotel where he had chiefly waited on provincials. I was the means of getting Walter engaged, and I must say that I have always found him respectful and obliging. But this has nothing to do with the business, says you—"

"Well, I was near saying it," replied Mangles, laughing; "but I never interrupt you, Jimmy, do I?"

"Better if you did, I dare say," said Rydon, "edit me, as you might say, ha! ha! Well, where had I got? Yes, well, I told Wigs that I thought he was severe on the fellow, who did his best, and could not be expected to know every body in a club in which he hadn't been more than a month; for you see Wigram had sent him with a message to Sandwith, and the man said he wasn't in the house, though Sandwith was all the time writing in the library, and Walter thought he was Major Croft, not that they are a bit like, and it was stupid, certainly, I don't deny that. What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing."

"Yes, I see, at my parentheses, don't you call them? Yes, but you ought to understand every thing. Well, I said this to Wigram, and he said that he supposed that any member of a club who had reason to complain of a servant had a right to say so, and that he was not aware that there was any thing against it in the rules, and so on. I thought he was chaffing, and I kept it up, telling him that he ought to draw up a memorial to the committee, setting out that Walter, by force and arms, and moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil, had traitorously taken Jack Sandwith for Major Croft, and some fellows laughed."

"I dare say. We are easily amused, you know, at the Octagon," said Mangles.

"Any how we don't cut up rough, Mr. Cynical. But Wigram did, and he turned upon me, and said that the habit of personality and impertinence was getting far too common, and that there ought to be less of it."

"Some other people think that, Jimmy."

"You, for instance, perhaps, who are always poking at people."

"Only for their good. But get on. Mr. Pruth, who is an accomplished short-hand-writer, and accustomed to condense, looks at you with admiration—you are just the sort of speaker a reporter likes, because he gets nothing to do."

"I am telling you the whole story. When he said impertinence I thought I ought to notice it, not that I care what he says, but it isn't an agreeable word, you'll allow that, I suppose?"

"Not at all agreeable. If you are a peaceable man you can take it in the sense of irrelevance, however—that's its legal meaning."

"Yes, but that's not what Mr. Wigram meant. So I asked him civilly whether I was right in supposing that he intended the word to apply to any thing I had said. For really I had not meant to be impertinent to him, only I hate to hear waiters spoken to as if they were brutes. I can blow them up sky-high when necessary, but I hope in a gentlemanly manner. I think it is so dam cowardly to insult a fellow who dare not answer you again, because that would be losing his means of living."

"An amiable sentiment—what said Wigram?"

"He said that I might take it to myself or not, just as I pleased."

"And you pleased—"

"Well, I think I answered pretty well, not being, as I have said, a clever cove, who pretends to be always ready with a smart thing. I said that as he was good enough to leave me the option—I like the word option, Sam, it sounds scientific, like optics—the option of choosing whether I would believe a gentleman guilty of rudeness or not, I would prefer the negative. Don't you call that a neat answer now?"

"It showed good feeling, which is better."

"Eh? You getting sentimental, too! That's not in your line, Mangles."

"So there the matter ended?"

"Did it, though? Mr. Wigram seemed to think that the better part of valor was discretion, and he made no answer to what I said, though two or three fellows applauded it, in the hope of stirring him up. But after a little time he began about the house-dinners, and abused the committee for allowing them. It seemed that he had wanted to give somebody a dinner in the strangers' room, and had been shut out by a house-dinner. After he had growled at this for a bit, and mind you, I never saw him so much out of sorts, for he is usually good-natured enough with all his affectation, somebody said—I think Dalston—that Wigram had enjoyed many house-dinners, and that he ought not to be a dog in the manger. He declared that he never had, and he was at once reminded of the dinner we gave to Ernest Dormer."

"We've come to him at last."

"What, have I rambled? I am sure every thing I have said bears upon the topic in hand. Topic in hand—that's another favorite word of mine. Yes—well—how was it? I know."

"You had dined?"

"Of course I had dined. Most people have dined at ten o'clock, unless they are cannibals, as Mr. Wigram was good enough to call me one day because I did not agree with him about the way of cooking canvas-backed ducks, not that I bear him any grudge for that. Yes, I had dined. Oh, I see what you mean. Thank you, Sir; I owe you half a one, as Harley used to say. I was as right as I am now. I was only desirous that you should quite understand how the words came about. That dinner having been mentioned, and Wigram having therefore been convicted of his blunder, he said nothing about that, but repeated Ernest Dormer's name in a most contemptuous tone."

"Did he?" said Mangles, with shut teeth.

"Yes; right down contempt—in the exaggerated way they do on the stage."

"Well, who noticed it?"

"Every body—there were half a dozen present—and he said it so that all must hear. We stared at each other—there did not seem much else to do."

"Nobody asked him what he meant?"

"Not at first. Dalton held up his soda-tumbler, in sign that he supposed Wigram was tipsy, and then nobody spoke for a minute or two—one don't want to quarrel with a man who isn't all right. But I suppose that silence aggravated and annoyed him—silence will have that effect, you know, when you are cross with too much wine."

"Yes, yes, well?"

"So he said again, much in the same tone, 'Mr. Ernest Dormer. Yes. That was a pleasant marriage for people to call gentlemen together to celebrate.' And he repeated, 'A very pleasant marriage,' two or three times."

"You hear that, Pruth?"

"I think I should have said something if I had been there," said Mr. Pruth, quietly. "I am not a club-man, Mr. Rydon, and so I do not know how far men allow themselves to go in the way of scoffing at their friends, but the words seem to me to justify notice."

"By Jove! they got notice enough, my dear Sir, and you are quite right to say that they deserved it. Fact is, we were taken aback at first, and then we made allowance for the wine. But as soon as he had said that Charley Launceston called out to him, 'I say,' said Charley, who was in a rage, 'I'll thank you to be good enough to recollect, Wigram, that I was chiefly instrumental in getting up that dinner, and that I believed it was a right thing to do, and what's more, I believe so still.'"

"A good fellow," said Pruth.

"He is that," said Rydon, "as good a fellow as lives, and I always say so. Well, Wigram only answered, 'Do you?' in a sneering kind of way, which was not exactly calculated to throw oil on the fire—on the waters, I mean—and it did not. Launceston got up and leaned over the back of his chair for all the world as if he was going to preach—not that he is one of the preaching sort, Mr. Pruth, but as frank and honest a chap as I know—and he made a little speech at Master Wigram, setting out that it was not the first time that friends of Mr. Dormer had noticed that Wigram was induced to disparage Dormer's marriage; and that now he had

given vent to his feeling in a way that there was no mistaking, he ought not to be surprised if he was called upon to explain what he meant, or something of that sort, for I don't pretend to give you the exact words, only we all thought that they were to the purpose."

"And did he venture on explanation?" asked Mangles, eagerly.

"There really is something up, then, old fellow?" asked Rydon. "I hear so many lies in the club and out of it that I never know what to believe; but I fancy that there is something, and I suppose you know all about it."

"That is the lady Ernest Dormer has married," said Mangles, taking down a framed photograph, and handing it to Rydon. "I told you that you should see it here. Do you think that is a marriage to be disparaged?"

"Gad, what a sweet face!" said Rydon, enthusiastically. "Gad, a fellow might be hanged for a woman like that! That is something like a beauty."

"Now give it me back—I'll show it you again afterward—and tell me what Mr. Wigram had to say against that lady, that is, if he dared to say any thing."

"He told Launceston not to be a humbug."

"Which Launceston of all men in the world is not."

"So three or four said; on which Wigram answered, quite savagely, that any man was a humbug who pretended to shut his eyes to things which were very well known."

"That was a safe and a sneaking kind of speech."

"Why, it was sneaking, but not quite safe, as you shall hear. For Launceston, who, you know, is not given to bluster, said, in a distinct sort of voice—what do you call it when a fellow challenges you to answer?—a defiant sort of voice, that a man was worse than a humbug, and was a coward, who wrapped up insinuations so that they might do mischief but could not be noticed."

"Very right," said Mr. Pruth.

"We thought it rather strong," said Rydon; "but I don't know that it was not very right, as you say, only men get into a habit of saying little things, and coward is a large word to come down upon 'em with suddenly."

"I am not for hard words," said Mangles, "but this one was not misplaced. I'll tell you why hereafter; let us get to the end of your story."

"We looked at Wigram to see what he was going to do; and if he had walked right up to Launceston and told him to take the word back or have his head punched it would scarcely have been too strong a measure, don't you think?"

"But what *did* he do, confound it?" said Mangles.

"He did nothing. But he said that it might be less prudent in friends of Mr. Dormer to get up a quarrel over a business that would not bear talking about than to let it alone until it should be forgotten."

"Launceston, you see, was right."

"Perhaps, in a sense, you know; but coward's a hard word."

"You are none, Jimmy, and you need not be so sensitive for a man who is one."

"I don't like it, I tell you. Wigram was right enough in saying that we carry personality too far. But in answer to this Launceston returned to the charge, and said that he was a friend of Dormer's; that he denied that there was any thing wrong about the marriage; and that unless Wigram made out his case there and then, he, Launceston, should consider him a person with whom it was not desirable to associate."

"A pleasant sort of evening among gentlemen, if I may make the remark," said Pruth.

"I don't remember any thing of the kind occurring before," said Rydon; "but it's not the thing, I admit. So Henry Wigram was, as you may say, pinned: and for myself, I am bound to say that I should have been as hard upon him as Launceston was if it had come to my turn to play, for a fellow that speaks against a woman deserves all he gets."

"When there *is* nothing against her."

"Then he is simply a rascal who ought to be hung up; but I mean when there is," said the chivalrous Rydon. "Nobody ought to speak against a woman under any circumstances at all. They are not altogether responsible, at least I know that is the opinion of scientific men, though I think the line should be drawn somewhere, say murder, or something in that way. Besides, they can't defend themselves. I never speak against a woman, though I have had some cause, but that's neither here nor there."

"Dreadful sentiments, Mr. Pruth."

"There's a good deal in what Mr. Rydon says, but I don't agree in his arguments. The fact that men make women what they are is the real reason why men should treat them gently."

"Wigram was pinned, excuse my pinning you," said Mangles.

"Oh, there's not much more to tell," said Jimmy Rydon. "He, that is, Wigram, seemed to get more and more flustered, and I think he would have flared out in rage, only his prudence struggled hard and kept him down. At last he said that he was not going to sit there to be catechised, and that twice that evening there had been an attempt made to deprive him of freedom of speech. This was at me, as I told you, for taking him to task for blowing up poor Walter undeservedly. I laughed out, which I thought was the most rational way of answering a fool according to his folly, which we are told to do, and not to do, according to circumstances, I suppose, or perhaps Solomon did not have his proof-sheets carefully edited. He looked savagely at me, Wigram did—not Solomon, you know—but I suppose he thought that I was not the right kind of party to bully, though Heaven knows I'm good-natured enough. But he said, after a short time, that, though no one had any right to ask him for explanations, Mr. Launces-

ton might repeat his question that day fortnight, unless it was answered for him and the rest of the club in the mean time."

"That was all that passed?"

"Nearly all, I think. We felt that on the whole this was fair, and that Wigram had kept his temper well under provocation. I had rowed him, and Launceston had called him a hard name, and the waiter had annoyed him, and he had had wine, and altogether, you see, allowances were due to him."

"Actually, your good-nature, which is excessive, my dear Rydon, is making you argue Wigram into the hero of the story, instead of making him out a spiteful slander-monger."

"Now that's a hard word too, but you gentlemen of the press like those condensed epitaphs —epithets—epigrams—come, I've got it among you."

"Did Launceston say no more?"

"Yes, I forgot. He said that he might have expressed himself warmly, but that he stood by all he had said, only that he retracted it for the time mentioned by Mr. Wigram, at the end of which he should take the liberty of repeating it. I staid to see the storm out, and then I went to billiards."

"Read this," said Samuel Mangles, handing him Henry Wigram's note. "I should tell you that I took an opportunity of saying something to him on the subject."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Ah, that may partly explain his pleasant temper. You had ruffled his feathers, and he took too much wine to smooth them down, and he smoothed them too much. Come, I think we have all been rather down upon him, Mangles. But you won't say that, being an editor. Your virtues don't lean to mercy's side, as the poet says, though I don't know which respected author. What does he say? Why," said Rydon, when he had read the note, "that's all in the same key as what he said last night."

"Yes, but look, this was written this morning. It is not from the club—at least it is not on club paper."

"So he repeats in cold blood what he said overnight, you see," said Mr. Pruth.

"Then," said Mangles, "the question repeats itself—how does he know that any thing is going on?"

"I should like to begin with another question," said Jimmy Rydon, "if I may, and that is this, old fellow—is any thing going on?"

"There I am in a cleft stick, Pruth," said Mangles.

"Oh, my boy," said Rydon, laying his big hand on Mangles's shoulder, "don't put yourself into any bother for my sake. I should like to know all about it, if it was only for the sake of that sweet woman there, about whom I will be damned if I believe any harm. But I dare say I shall hear in good time, or rather bad time, if it's any thing to hurt her. Let's have another look at her."

There was nothing but honest, manly admiration in the regard which Jimmy Rydon (who was any thing but a moralist) expressed for the beautiful girl who, in her bridal dress, was thus brought before him. The form into which he compressed the sentiments aroused by the charming portrait was not graceful, but it came from a good fellow's heart.

"Now I wish that I had punched Master Wigram's head."

"No, you don't," said Mangles, "nor would it have been right, at all events, as he says, at present. And in answer to your wish to know something more, my dear fellow, I will be very frank with you. I know next to nothing now, but I expect to know a good deal. Another visitor?"

It was Ernest Dormer himself.

He was very pale, but had regained the composure of which we have seen him deprived. He accosted his friends much as he would have done at any other time, except that his nod to Jimmy Rydon would, the day before, have been accompanied by some good-natured word. He shook hands with Mr. Pruth.

"You dined at Greenwich, after all," said Mangles, who was very glad to see Ernest Dormer again his visitor.

"I did," said Dormer, "but don't be angry. I was quite unfit for the pleasant society you proposed. I hope the ladies enjoyed themselves."

"I hope so too," said Mangles, "wherever they were. I got them to give up the idea when I found I could not have you."

"Ah! that was hard," said Dormer. "Surely you could have found another man. There was Rydon."

"Rydon don't like dining out with ladies," said Jimmy. "They don't know what they are eating, and they expect you to neglect your food and talk."

"But then they are not responsible, you know," said Mangles, looking hard at Rydon. He meant this speech as a hint to the latter to recollect the subject on which they had been speaking, and to go away, but it did not take effect upon James Rydon for a considerable time. It was necessary for his friends to allow a certain period to elapse after administering any indirect suggestions, but when it worked the excellent Rydon was prompt to comply with the wish he had just discovered.

"Ladies and Greenwich dinners," thought Mr. Pruth. "That is the way they talk when the misery of two lives may be approaching."

"Would you have had us melodramatic?" would probably have been the answer. "We must say something, and what matters the words?"

"I did not call to apologize, however, Mangles. I know you don't want that sort of thing from me."

"Certainly not: not even the explanation that you know I don't want it."

"I came to say that in all probability I shall have to go out of town at short notice."

"Then we are to write to you at Naybury," said Mr. Pruth, who was not a man of the world, and therefore showed in a natural and creditable manner what his feelings were. He hoped to hear an affirmative answer.

"Please not to write to me at all," said Ernest Dormer, "until I ask you to do so. My movements may be uncertain for a time. But before I go there are two or three things to be said. Rydon, I am glad you are here. I have heard of something which occurred at the Octagon last night."

"Rydon, feeling that as your intimate friend I ought to know of it, kindly came down to tell me," said Mr. Mangles.

"Several of my intimate friends were present," said Ernest, quickly; and Mangles accepted the answer as meaning that for the future he was to claim no special fellowship.

"May I ask who had the good nature to hurry to you with the chatter of the smoking-room?" said Rydon.

"Nay, it was the right and kind thing to do," said Dormer. "A man's friends ought not to leave him in ignorance of what concerns his good name. It was Charley Launceston, to whom I am deeply obliged. And though he did not say a great deal about his own share in the matter, I am quite sure that he behaved in a loyal and friendly way as regarded me."

"And that he did, by Gad!" said Jimmy Rydon, "and Mangles will tell you that I said so. Not to say one thing before your face and another behind your back, I repeat what I told Mangles, that I thought Charley was almost too hard upon a certain person."

"You are very good to me to say so, Rydon, when the certain person was pleased to make an offensive remark about me."

"No, not about you," said Jimmy Rydon, wisely.

"Yes, yes, it was about Dormer," said Mangles, breaking in rapidly to prevent further mischief; "and," he added, talking on to keep out Rydon, "I am far from thinking that even the word coward was too strong for a man who assails another in his absence with vague scandals."

"But I tell you—" persisted Rydon, the good-natured but stupid.

"Are you going all over the story again?" asked Mangles. "You know his style, Dormer, and the extraordinary elaborateness of his narrative, but you never heard him in such force as he has shown to-day. Still, it is not given to two men to hear that tale twice and live, is it, Mr. Pruth?"

"Oh! Ah!" said Jimmy Rydon, suddenly. "Yes. Good-by, old fellow;" and he went out without further ceremony.

"Offended?" asked Mr. Pruth.

"Not a bit," said Mangles. "He has just found out what I meant five minutes back when I conveyed to him a delicate hint to go away. He went the moment he perceived my intention. A right down good fellow."

"Yes," said Ernest Dormer. "But as I am unhappily a little quicker at seeing a hint, will you let me ask you why you were so peremptory in cutting short his speech just now?"

"Simply, my dear Ernest, because I wished to tell you the story myself, if it were necessary to tell it at all, which I suppose not to be the case."

"Only, as Rydon was present, and you were not—but you mean so well, Mangles, that I am ashamed to take this tone with you. You leave on my mind the impression that more was said than you care I should hear. Am I wrong?"

"To be frank with you, I think that Henry Wigram was so offensive in his tone that if his language had been repeated, you would have quarreled with that good-hearted pachyderm for saying that allowances might be made."

"Did he say any thing about Mrs. Dormer?" asked Ernest, sternly.

"No."

"Then where do you conceive the sting of his speech, if it has any, to lie?"

"This is not a pleasant theme, my dear fellow. Nothing that a thousand Henry Wigram's might say could injure you in the estimation of your friends; and as we don't fight duels in England, it is of no use picking up grievances unless they have been thrown into our faces."

"No," said Ernest Dormer, "we do not fight duels. You are quite right. And as you are sure that I shall not send Mr. Wigram a challenge, there can be no objection to your telling me what you think was so particularly offensive in his language. Don't mind speaking before Pruth, whom I look upon as a friend, and quite as true a friend as any body else."

This remark nettled Mangles, in spite of his desire to make ample peace with Ernest, and he said:

"I think this persistency a little—well, a little idle; but you have a right to an answer from me. I think Henry Wigram meant that you had married a lady for whom you did not care, and had done so for the sake of her money."

"You know, Mangles, that you think he meant nothing of the kind, but I thank you for your endeavor to save my feelings. Now let me ask you whether you will name the person who was the first to set about slanders respecting my wife?"

"Yes," said Mangles. "I have his permission to do so. But it is hardly worth while giving it you now."

"Because I have already horsewhipped him?"

"Horsewhipped — whom? What do you mean?" said Mangles.

"Who is the gentleman?" said Ernest, composedly.

Mr. Pruth, evidently delighted, snatched at Wigram's note without his chief's leave, and handed it to Ernest Dormer.

"Yes," said Dormer. "This was written before my call upon him. Perhaps he would not write quite so neat a note now."

"I am sorry to hear this, Dormer," said Mangles.

"Really. My friends seem to have a special tenderness for Mr. Wigram," said Ernest. "He must have many good qualities, of which, unhappily, I know nothing, or so much regard is unaccounted for."

"Don't talk in that way, Dormer," said Mangles, with an earnestness of anger that was really affectionate. "You do justice neither to yourself nor to two or three men who would do much for you. Henry Wigram! Do you pretend to think that I should care, except on your own account, if you had broken his neck? You know better. What I mean by being 'sorry,' deeply sorry, is that the act you have committed answers me a question which I was afraid to ask."

Ernest looked at him thoughtfully for a moment.

"I understand," he said.

"I do not," said Mr. Pruth; "but though Mr. Dormer has been good enough to speak of me as he has done, I do not feel that I have a right to ask an explanation."

"Do you need one?" said Mangles. "Ask Mr. Dormer whether he would have done this thing a week ago?"

"No," said Ernest Dormer.

"But the remarks would have been equally offensive," said Mr. Pruth; "and I may say, though you know I am the quietest of men, that I can't feel any sorrow that this Mr. Wigram has been beaten."

"And his remarks, my dear Mangles, only applied to my supposed fortune-hunting!" said Ernest Dormer, with a slight smile of reproach.

"You have affixed another meaning to them now, at all events," said Mangles, sadly, as he looked up at the photograph of the beautiful girl. "And but for something which has passed since we met you would not have caused your wife to be talked about, no, not for the sake of all the impertinences ever uttered in that cursed club."

"No," said Ernest Dormer. "But I had an interval of inaction prescribed for me, and I found it insupportable. Chance came to my help in the shape of Charley Launceston and his narrative, so I heard him out, and then went and beat Wigram."

"Am I to ask you any thing more? I have no desire to do so. You have told me enough to make me very miserable. And you had inaction prescribed to you, of course by some one who had a right to expect compliance, and you obey by instantly bringing *her* name before society."

"It was necessary that Wigram should be beaten," was Ernest Dormer's only answer. "And I thought it well to tell you. If not too much trouble, would you mention in the Octagon Club that I did it, and why?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DATE.

"I WILL know that," said Ernest Dormer, between his teeth.

It was on the following morning. He had slept, or rather had passed the troubled, weary night, at a hotel in Covent Garden, and, having found no letter from the Sergeant, he had gone to the Museum and searched the journals in order to discover any account of the inquest on Andrew Barton. He had been successful, that is to say, he found a very brief narrative of the affair; but, short as it was, Mr. Dudley had contrived to get himself mentioned in it with credit, and had procured the record of a compliment to himself from the coroner, who might or might not have uttered the imputed civility. Dormer took a note of the exact date, and of one or two points in the case, and left the Museum, refusing, with an abruptness which surprised a friend whom he had encountered in the hall, an invitation to come and examine a rare collection of eggs which had just been purchased for the ornithological department.

"Why, you used to be quite learned in eggs," said his friend, "and I thought I was offering you a treat."

"I!"

"Yes, to be sure. There was some pleasure in showing you such things."

"Yes," said Ernest, dreamily. "You are quite right. I had forgotten. But I have business to attend to — excuse me, and many thanks."

He was in Russell Street before he was quite sure of the name of the man who had spoken to him, or, indeed, whether he had been spoken to at all.

"To be sure," he said. "I took *her* there, and she got at some tints for her work. It seems twenty years ago. I wish it were."

Still no note at the hotel from Penguin.

Of course he had said that Dormer might not hear from him all that day, but he ought to have written something.

"Why should I wait for him?" muttered Ernest. "It is my own business, not his. Probably he will do nothing. At all events, there is one thing which I can do, and I will."

An hour later Magdalen received a telegram from her husband. And this was what he said:

"*A strange story. It is desirable for me to know a date this afternoon. If you can tell me about the day on which you were at Vaughan's meet the train which reaches Naybury at* 3.30. *I can see you, and return by that which passes through at* 3.55. *No time to answer this.*"

"Well," said Magdalen to herself, "I think he might as well have said 'Come,' whether I had the date or not, but he knew that I should come. Mamma, can I have the pony carriage at three?"

"Can you, dear? Of course you can. What for?"

"Ernest is coming down for a few minutes,

THE DATE.

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just to speak to me, and going up again by the next train."

"That is very affectionate. Have you been telling him that you could not bear to spend another day without setting eyes on him?"

"No, Mrs. Conway, dear, that is not the sort of message I send. But I am so glad."

"You need not tell me that. The piece of paper brightened you up like a bit of sunshine."

"And it is a bit. Will you order the carriage, mamma? I have some business to attend to," she added, with pretended importance.

"I'll take care. That train is always late, though, so you need not hurry."

"Late, is it?" said Magdalen. "I am sorry for that. No, I am not, for if he misses the return one he must stay to dinner. But Ernest's trains are never late."

"Go along, child, and attend to your business," said her mother, laughing.

That train, however, justified Mrs. Conway's

assertion. It was nearly twenty minutes after time. It is needless to say that Magdalen was waiting on the platform long before a single porter had appeared, or that she was the first to detect the distant cloud of white that announced Ernest's approach.

Her hand was in his as he led her aside.

"I shall scarcely save the other, but I must," were his first words. "How well you are looking, Magdalen. Have you got the date I asked for?"

There was no one within ear-shot of the place, and poor Magdalen might have expected a more affectionate salutation. But she was too good a girl to evince the slightest petulance, and it was with a proud little smile that she drew out a tiny book and showed it him.

"Don't you know that I am a woman of business," she said, "and know all my dates? I can give you that exactly. There is the entry, Sir."

And she pointed to some penciling.

The date was plain enough, for it was printed.

"Yes," she said, "and there, in the money column, the day before, is another item which bears upon this one—do you see, Sir? a payment to a jeweler, rather a large sum for poor me, but I will tell you all about that when we have time. Am I not an accurate personage? —Dearest Ernest!"

He had become very white, and she was frightened.

"What is it, Ernest?" she said, catching at his arm.

"It is nothing," he said; "the carriage was hot, and—"

Again he read the entry and the note of the payment to the jeweler—fixing his eyes on the lines as if they were trying to escape him, and he had resolved that they should not.

"Don't go back—stay with me!" cried Magdalen. "I can not let you go back ill. I will go with you then. Let me!"

"No, no," said Ernest. "I will take this book—no—"

"Take it—take it, of course—is it not yours, dearest? But," she continued, hurriedly, for the bell had rung, "I am sure you are not fit to travel. Stay for the next train, at least."

"No, I will not take the book," said Ernest Dormer—a gentleman's nature speaking in him even in that moment of trial. "Put it—up. There's the train! I can just save it by crossing. I will write. Take all care of yourself."

He sprang away, and, in defiance of the warning cries of half a dozen porters, rushed across the rails, and leaped up on to the opposite platform.

"I did not think you would have done such a thing as that, Mr. Dormer," said the station-master, reproachfully.

"I did not think it myself," said Ernest, hardly hearing what answer he was making. "I have a return ticket, Mr. Saunders."

In another minute he was on his way to London.

Magdalen, who had been at first frightened by his looks, and then astonished at his abruptness, continued to gaze on the diminishing train.

"He did not kiss me. He did not hold my hand. He does not wave to me from the window. How can I have offended him? No, it is not that—that is impossible. He must be very ill indeed. I wish I had insisted on going up to town with him. I wish mamma had been here. I will go up by the next. He remembered to tell me to take care of myself—he remembered every thing, but he was bewildered with illness. How wicked of me to think of myself first, and to fancy that he was unkind! Why would he not take the book? Perhaps he thought I had some foolish girl-secrets in it, and he would not see them. That is just what he would have thought, and here am I half crying because he did not lose the train for the sake of—I am ashamed of myself. I wonder whether mamma will let me go to town? He said he would write. That seems as if I ought to wait for the letter—but then, if he is really ill? How wrong it is to let the trains be so late," said Magdalen, comforted at having some one whom she could lawfully reproach. "If they had been punctual he would have had nearly half an hour with me. I will make him write against them as soon as ever he settles down with me again."

"You look vexed, child," said Mrs. Conway, who stood at the door, waiting the return of Magdalen. "Did he not come?"

"I am vexed, mamma. As you prophesied, the train was very late. I don't think it gave him three minutes, and the other was so punctual."

"However, we have seen him, and we are happy," said her mother, smiling.

"We are not at all happy. He is very unwell—ill, indeed."

"Nonsense, Magdalen," said Mrs. Conway, with extreme concern, however. "You easily frighten yourself for other people, though you never do for yourself. What makes you say this?"

"He turned deadly white, dear, and I think he hardly knew what he was saying. He did not even look out at me from the carriage window. Oh, if he fell down on getting in, and there should be no one—"

"Magdalen," said her mother, seating herself by her child, and placing an arm around her. "I shall be very angry with you if this goes on."

The tears blinded Magdalen's blue eyes, and she did not see her father enter the room.

"What is it?" he asked, alarmed.

"It is nothing, William. I wish you had been at home, as you could have gone with her to the station; but you wander away without telling any body where you can be found."

To this prompt and unexpected attack Mr. Conway made no reply, but Magdalen said:

"I have seen Ernest, and he is ill, papa."

"But well enough to go back to London, as

he intended," said Mrs. Conway, "and here is Magdalen distressing herself in the most absurd manner. When is he coming back again?"

"He said he would write," sobbed Magdalen.

"And he was well enough to think of that? Come, come! And as to his not noticing you from the carriage, it may have been full, and he was in the other corner—you must not be childish."

"No, mamma, you are right; but I ought to go up to town and see after him, ought I not? I could go at six o'clock."

"If you are out of your senses I am not," said Mrs. Conway. "I wonder what he would say to me for allowing you to move. I would not let you go for the world; and so you may dismiss that from your mind, dear. Now I shall just take you to your room, and you will remain there quietly, on the sofa, until I fetch you to dinner."

Mr. Conway waited his wife's return, but not very patiently, and the time was long. She came at last.

"I don't like this," he said.

"You don't like what, William?"

"What does Dormer mean by sending for her to the train, saying half a dozen words to her, and rushing away, making her think he is ill, and knocking her up?"

"I have not asked her what he wished to see her about. Would it have been right?"

"It is strange that she should not have told you."

"I would not let her talk. I made her be quiet."

"He did not say good-by from the carriage window," said Mr. Conway.

"Now, papa, don't you go and confirm her nonsensical fears with any nonsense of your own. You know how ready you are to see all sorts of evils that don't exist, and how you brought out doubts, and fears, and suspicions about the marriage which has turned out so happily for her. I won't have you getting back to that sort of thing, please."

"Mary, never mind my nature; but tell me whether you think that there has been any thing unpleasant between them."

"What reason can I have for thinking so?"

"That's not an answer. Mary, you are too right-hearted a woman to stand by your own opinion a moment longer than you are satisfied with it. And I am the oldest friend you have in the world."

"Please, William, do not press me at this moment," said Mrs. Conway, with a troubled expression.

"But that *is* an answer," said Mr. Conway, gravely.

"Yes. But do not make more of it than it is worth. I have heard next to nothing from Magdalen. I would not allow her to say much. But I own to you, William, that I think she has been more disturbed by this moment's talk with Ernest than she will care to say. I know she thinks that he is ill. But unless I mistake her very much, she is pondering over something else, and not getting comfort out of her thoughts."

"Is it some money-matter of his? That's what these hurried journeys often mean. Did he come for something he had left, and has he told her that he will not be able to return?"

"Good Heavens, William dear! what is the use of guess-work like that? In the first place, what right have you to accuse him of being in any difficulty?"

"What did he go away at all for?"

"When a man says business he shuts your mouth. And Magdalen declared that she knew all about the business, and made fun of the awful secret which he had forbidden her to reveal. You know how you laughed about it with her."

"Yes. But she is in no mood to laugh now. Something has happened, and we ought to know what."

"I think so too. But we must be very gentle."

"Are we often any thing else with her, dear child?" said Mr. Conway.

"I shall say nothing to her to-night. If her cheerfulness comes back in the morning all will be well. If not, we must wait until she hears from Ernest, and when we see the effect of that letter we shall know what to think. In the mean time let us try to believe that we are disquieting ourselves about nothing."

"That's the homely, practical advice which I was sure of from you, Mary, and if it were only as easy to follow advice as to give it all would be well. But I am going to be exceedingly miserable until the affair is cleared up, if it ever is, and I can no more help that state of mind than I can twist that tree."

"I know it, William. All I can say is, do not let her see it. Talk and joke with her as usual. And don't, in a pointed way, avoid speaking of Ernest."

Such were the counsels of affection—such was the thought taken for Magdalen by those who loved her best of all. Two of the most honest and most kindly natures in the world were troubled but by her trouble and how they might best tend her. Upon that loyal and unselfish love she may rely while those who bear it have breath to speak it. Yet it was not of that true gold that Magdalen lay thinking, but of other ore which she had sought, not in vain, to believe as precious, but which might prove false in the hour of her great need. Not as yet, however, had that fearful thought crossed her mind. She had but an unpleasant sensation, as of one of those dreams, rather harsh and rough than dismal, which sometimes come and disturb us for hours with the impression that some whom we love are estranged and cold. Then comes the sunshine, and all the truth and love come back, proved and warm. And Magdalen, with an agitating sigh, which she chided, waited for her sunshine to return. Meantime, he who could have made it was hastening back to London with a piece of evidence which he would have given any price to believe false.

But there was no doubt about it. The coin-

cidence was made out. The lines upon which he had glared, as they were so innocently pointed out by his wife, were written under the very date he had extracted at the Museum:

"186–. . *August* 6. *To P. V.'s. Gave him the locket.*"

And a couple of days earlier was the girl's entry of the payment to the jeweler who had sold her the trinket.

The visit—the present—the murder, all indissolubly linked. For a time this fact was too strong, too menacing, to permit Ernest Dormer to think at all. It was there—shut up with him in the carriage—going with him to London, and to abide with him in his waking and sleeping hours thenceforth and always.

He was alone, luckily.

He hardly knew why he took out the memorandum he had made, and for the hundredth time read the date he had copied. No chance of his being mistaken. It seemed the only date in the world. Small objects on which his eye rested seemed to form themselves into those figures, blank spaces seemed inscribed with them. Now it was his own writing, now Magdalen's, that danced before his sight, and then the writings intertwined like serpents, as lines will do in a nightmare. He wished that he had not known the truth. And then for a time he sank into a kind of stupor, and he was not sure whether he had slept or not, when he suddenly started up with a sense of a relief which came on him so overpoweringly that he was unable to speak. He sat back and yielded helplessly to a new and merciful thought which had dawned on him.

"It is out of all possibility," was this thought. "Proof! The proof's in that very entry, handed to me by herself, with that smile. Am I mad enough to believe that she made but half a record, and that after the words, '*Gave him the locket,*' she might have added '*Saw him do the murder?*' I should be a madman to hold such a belief. There is a mystery, and I can not solve it; but it is there."

And to this faith he resolved to cling, and he brought his will to bear upon it, and there followed the thought that though the evidence he had obtained seemed to corroborate the foul story that had been told him, it really disproved it.

With this view of the case he returned to London.

He had left word at his hotel that he should return there at a given hour. He found Sergeant Penguin waiting for him. It was late in the evening, and the Sergeant had demanded a private room and the best bottle of claret that was to be had, and with this he had made considerable progress.

"You have been waiting for me some time, I fear," said Dormer.

"That you infer from low wine-mark," said the lawyer; "but I was thirsty. I knew that you could not be back from Naybury much sooner."

"What makes you suppose I have been there?"

"I felt that you would go."

"Well?"

"Naturally, my only business with you now should be to say that as you decline to follow my advice I decline to give any more."

"You would be justified. But I do not believe that you are here to say that."

"That depends," said the Sergeant, ringing for another glass.

"I will not drink any thing," said Ernest Dormer. He was silent until the waiter had retired for the second time, and Penguin, taking no notice of the refusal, had filled both glasses. Then Dormer asked:

"Have you any thing to tell me?"

"I should like first to hear what you have to tell me."

"My wife was at Vaughan's rooms on the day of the murder."

The Sergeant threw up his gold eye-glass and looked hard at Dormer. Not rudely, but in sheer and strong curiosity.

"You speak—or does my ear deceive me?—you speak with a certain satisfaction in your tone, Dormer, or at least as if you were not displeased at being able to say this. Mrs. Dormer, you assert—"

"I said my wife," replied Ernest, quietly.

"Ah!" said the Sergeant. "I accept all which the correction means. You have seen your wife?"

"I have seen her."

"All is explained to your satisfaction, then? I do not see why you refuse to take your wine. I congratulate you upon so happy an issue to a singular series of incidents."

But he did not say this as if he meant it, but in his own favorite tentative fashion.

"Nothing is explained," said Ernest. "I can add nothing to what I told you yesterday except what I have just said."

"I speak without the faintest irritation, my dear Dormer," said Sergeant Penguin, frankly; "and I only ask whether you shall wish me to interest myself in the business."

"Wish! I beg you to do so. It is precisely where it was when we parted, with the single addition of the fact that I have my wife's avowal that on the day in question she visited those chambers."

"And, pardon the question, you are on good terms with her?"

"I saw her for less than five minutes, having to catch a train. I need not make any secret of the circumstances that I purposely arranged that our interview should be a short one, and you showed yesterday that you can appreciate the feeling which made me do this."

"Matters are not precisely where they were, Dormer, for you have forgotten to mention that you have committed an assault on the brother of Mrs. De Gully."

"On whom?" exclaimed Ernest, with the sincerest astonishment.

"Is there not a lady, or a person who calls herself a lady, and who also calls herself Mrs. De Gully, and resides near Naybury?"

"Yes."

"Does your wife visit her—does your family?"

"Certainly not. She is not a person whom I should desire them to visit."

"Do you know any thing against her?"

"Who knows any thing against any body? But one can object to make an acquaintance, though one is not supplied with divorce-court affidavits. We decline that person's acquaintance, that is all. What do you mean about her brother?"

"Do you deny the assault?" persisted Sergeant Penguin.

"I chastised a man named Wigram."

"And Mr. Wigram is her brother. I dare say he never told you so; for he is not, I suppose, particularly proud of his sister, though they assure me she is very delightful, and all that. But we sometimes fly to the arms of our relatives when we are in trouble—not that I should—and Mr. Wigram may seek for solace for his disgrace in the tenderness of his sister. However, that does not matter."

"Yes," said Ernest, with agitation, "it matters much."

"I see what you mean."

"Curse him! I wish I had not beaten him," said Dormer, earnestly; and it was easy to see that the regret was not for Mr. Wigram's sake.

"I am afraid it was a mistake; but you were not bound to know of the relationship, and so you have only to reproach yourself with a mere act of violence."

"Myself; I am not thinking about myself. This makes it only the more a matter of life and death that we should deal with the story before worse comes of it. What have you to say to me, Penguin? Pray speak plainly and fully, for this last piece of news makes me utterly unfit for any thing but action, and to that I must see my way at once."

"I shall ask you for no other promise, Dormer, seeing that you have broken the first one twice in twelve hours. I only say that you ought not to be rash; I say it for the sake of a lady who is too good to be put to the slightest needless pain."

"You are right. But you speak as if you knew more of her than I supposed."

"I know more than I did yesterday morning. I will tell you how this is presently. Now listen to me. A first story, well told, fixes itself on the mind of many of us—perhaps on all who are not professionally bound to believe most people liars—and it is terribly hard work to make a *tabula rasa*, and start fresh. That fellow Dudley had your ear, and he has acted his part well. I see that you can't get out of your head that there was a murder. There was none."

"Barton was killed, I suppose?"

"He was killed by a fall."

"You don't believe that he was thrown down by another hand?"

"No, and for the best reason; there was no other hand to throw him."

"Where was Vaughan?"

"I know not, nor does it signify, as he certainly was not in the only place in which he could have killed the poor man. He was away, and he was in hiding, and for very good reasons."

"But," said Dormer, "there is too much proof that he was not away, and on that day. My wife saw him, and gave him this."

He produced the locket. He had unconsciously retained it during his last stormy words with Dudley, and the latter was far too wise to demand it back from him. Dudley rejoiced that Ernest had taken with him that which would always remind him of their interview.

"That is a locket," said Penguin. "The rest is a lie of Dudley's."

"I would gladly believe that," said Ernest Dormer; "but do I not tell you that I have evidence which does not lie? I have my wife's."

"Dormer, you are an able man, and you are believing what a child would not hear. Do you sincerely maintain—I am afraid to use the words in your presence—do you sincerely assert that Mrs. Dormer, an incarnation of all that is good and loving in woman, knew—I won't say saw—but knew that a man had been flung from the parapet before a room in which she was, and that this sweet, sensitive, gentle lady never thought the thing worth mention?"

"Do I believe that? If I had ever really believed it I should have chased out such a thought after what I have seen to-day. But after the first confusion of a horrible story I never harbored that belief. I tell you the mystery has to be cleared, and that is the business of my life; but Vaughan was there, and if there the murder was not impossible."

"I repeat to you that he was not there, and I have the best reasons for believing this."

"Then the mystery would be darker than ever. How came Barton by his death?"

"As I always said: trying to steal, and making a hasty escape."

"And the rest a lie of Dudley's?"

"Yes; but the invention did not leap from his brain ready-made. He must have had something to build upon. He has kept the story by him for a long time; and though this is all against him it does not assist us, as slander is the worm that dieth not. And—again I ask pardon; but we have traced Mrs. Dormer to Gray's Inn."

"We have," said Ernest, darkly; "and we have fixed the day."

The Sergeant was silent.

"You have a theory of this," said Dormer, "and you probably withhold it because you believe that my affection for my wife would make me resent suggestions which you may be inclined to make. Thank you for that consideration. Whether I shall ever see her again is a question which I have now no means of answering. But I will never see her again in life unless I can stand before her with this cruel mystery all unraveled. And whether I may then have to ask her pardon for my course or bid her

ask my pardon for hers, on the day we meet again there shall be no more doubt. Therefore, Penguin, you will serve her and me best by the plainest dealing. What do you believe?"

"That the lady met Mr. Vaughan, but not in those chambers."

"Where?"

"I have no guess. He was in concealment; and I think I have some kind of clew—I do not know."

"She believed that she was in those chambers."

"I have no doubt of it," said Sergeant Penguin. (He had much.) "I have no doubt of it. A forger who almost deceived a first-class conveyancer would have an easy task to persuade an innocent young lady as to the locality of a house in an obscure part of London. Of course, if we were all pulling together—" He stopped.

"I do not quite understand you."

"I am consulted in your interest, not that of Mrs. Dormer."

"Suppose them the same until I say that they are not."

"I told you I would admit no sentimental feeling into this affair yesterday," said the Sergeant; "but the case is altered, and I prove it to you by declaring that those words give me much pleasure."

"If our interests were one?" said Ernest, inviting him to go on.

"It would be for us to obtain the required information from the only person who, in Vaughan's absence, can give it us, and who is most interested of any body in the world in having the story cleared up. This will, of course, have occurred to you, for you acted to-day upon the thought so far as procuring the evidence of the visit to the chambers."

"You mean," said Ernest, breathing hard, "that I ought to tell my wife the tale which Dudley hissed into my ear? Do you mean that?"

"Do not get excited when you have such an interest to watch."

"I am wrong; but go on."

"No," said the Sergeant, "I should not deem it necessary to profane a lady's ear with that ruffian's fiction. There would, I think, be no great difficulty in so planning the questions, which would be put by some intimate friend, as to convey to her the necessity of answering them frankly while we avoided hurting her womanly nature. I do not think that they should be put by yourself."

"I have told you that I don't see her again while questions are wanted."

"Such a decision is open to be reviewed if your reason were convinced that a different course were better. But I say again, I do not think that they should come from yourself. I see what is in your mind. Though you have listened to this scoundrel's story, and some of it clings to you, I see that you revolt at the idea of disturbing Mrs. Dormer by letting her know that any thing in her conduct has been called in question."

"That faintly expresses what I do mean."

"And it does you honor; and, what is better, it promises happiness in the future. But I am sorry to have to show you that you have already taken great pains to make it certain that slander, in one form or another, shall come to Mrs. Dormer and to all her friends. You felt that just now. How long do you think Mr. Wigram will wait before he revenges himself for his beating? He will write to Mrs. De Gully, whom you have cut. She will talk, and you can not beat *her*. What think you of the rule, 'Forewarned, forearmed?' And is it not a duty to Mrs. Dormer to protect her against the recoil of a chastisement inflicted by your own hand?"

CHAPTER XL.

MORE TALK IN NAYBURY.

More rapidly even than Sergeant Penguin had surmised would be the case did the tainted air of scandal make its way into Naybury. Who first detected it, and hastened to disclose the discovery, was never made quite certain. But the atmosphere was well prepared for its reception, and soon became more than sufficiently impregnated.

The truth was as Penguin had said. The handsome and not overguarded lady of Martletowers was the sister of Mr. Henry Wigram, and, for reasons which may occur to the reader, had been a thorn in his side for many a day. More than one matrimonial arrangement which Mr. Wigram had thought would conduce to his comfort and advantage had been rendered impracticable by the existence and conduct of this lady, who avenged herself for a very unequal distribution of the paternal property by forcing herself and her needs upon her brother whenever she could make an opportunity for doing so. And she usually selected the most awkward periods for putting herself in evidence. He had done what he could to free himself from her and her importunities by being as cold, as rude, and as neglectful as possible; but Mrs. De Gully, when she wanted money, was singularly forgiving and full of sisterly regard, and Wigram had usually to choose between sending a check or receiving a visit. Some people were ill-natured enough to say that he knew enough about horses to be aware that a very pretty gray, of which he once made Mrs. De Gully a present, with a story of his having bought it for a lady who had been forbidden to ride, was about as dangerous a brute as was ever mounted; but this was charging him with more than could be proved, and Mrs. De Gully rode the horse safely and sold him well. But that such things were said showed the idea which certain folks entertained of the affection between the handsome lady and her brother.

Just at the time of the *fracas* with Ernest

Dormer Mrs. De Gully happened to be especially persistent in her demands upon her brother's purse. It may be supposed that Captain De Gully, R.N., was more absent than ever, and that tradespeople were tired of receiving promises, no matter how charmingly scented the notes that bore them. At all events, Henry Wigram had been pestered with urgent demands for money, and was daily expecting to be informed that his sister had come to town to enforce them. He would have been informed, moreover, not only by herself, but by a paragraph in the papers which record the movements of the great. "Mrs. De Gully has arrived, from Martletowers, at the —— Hotel," would have been a pleasant piece of light reading for Henry Wigram and his friends. For all his friends knew who she was, and quite as much about her as he did, and did not fail to congratulate him, in a careless kind of way, whenever such an announcement appeared; that is, they said just enough to make him aware that they knew he was being annoyed. At this time it was particularly disagreeable to Henry Wigram to have his sister parading herself before society, as he had reason to think that he had made an impression of a desirable kind, and of which we may hear again. So he resolved to make a sacrifice for the sake of security, and he actually wrote rather a kind answer to Mrs. De Gully, almost condescending to apologize for having neglected her, and he sent her a handsome check, and half promised to run down and see her.

Mrs. De Gully was not in the least deceived, and knew that few things would please her affectionate Henry better than her demise or emigration; but she wrote a grateful and loving response, and described the delightful room which should be fitted up for him the moment he would say that he was really coming. And she gave him a little country news, which was not much in itself, but which, sauced in her pleasant style—she wrote a good letter, but for her love of quotations—was readable while waiting for dinner.

Something she said gave him a hint, and this flashed upon him before the scene with Ernest Dormer, and while Wigram was cherishing ill-will against him and those who took his part so warmly in his absence.

"I'll make some use of her, any how," said Henry Wigram.

So he accidentally asked, in the middle of a note about other matters, whether she saw much of the Dormers and Conways, who, he fancied, lived somewhere near her. He was speedily apprised that they did not choose to honor Mrs. De Gully with their acquaintance.

"Perhaps it is as well," he answered, "for I hear some odd things about Mrs. Ernest Dormer, and I hardly know what to believe. Perhaps people who have lived longer in Naybury than you have might show a light, if you asked for it with your accustomed tact, my dear Julia."

His dear Julia's accustomed tact, however, was not going to be put into play upon such a vague hint as that. She had a guess that her brother disliked Dormer, and she had no objection to do something disagreeable to a family which had slighted her. But she was not to be left to work at a cold scent like that, and take all the responsibility of making a mistake. With all her carelessness of tongue, Mrs. De Gully was reasonably awake to her own interest. She took very little notice of his suggestion, and waited to see whether it would be repeated.

It was repeated angrily enough in his next note, though she could not divine the cause of the anger. He was downright rude. He told her that she was always ready to pelt him with letters when she wanted any thing for herself, but she would not pay the least attention to a wish of his. Another time she might not find him so prompt to oblige her.

"How badly this note is written," said Mrs. De Gully to her companion, the silent Francine. "He usually writes so neatly. Looks as if it had been done after dinner."

"Or as if he had hurt his hand."

"At all events, he is in a rage," said Mrs. De Gully. "What can have made him so anxious to know about these people? They are commonplace folks enough, except Mr. Dormer, who has been good enough to look at me in a way which said that if he were not married and respectable he would not mind knowing me, but that as it was I had better keep my distance."

"Converts are always bigots," said the sententious Francine.

"Eh? Oh, I see what you mean. Yes, we heard about *that;* but Henry knows it all as well as Dormer himself—so do all the men of the club, and all the waiters. It is astonishing how well men keep faith to one another about all those things, even after they have quarreled."

"Mean wretches!" said Francine.

"However, my brother may be as angry as he likes. He shall explain himself, and then we will see what is to be done. I am not going to be his cat's-paw, but I don't mind scratching if I get a chance."

"You like it," said Francine.

"I am sure I never scratch you," said Mrs. De Gully, laughing, "though I often feel inclined when you won't say more than six words in a morning. I must answer the irate Henry, however. Give me the writing-case and things, there's a dear. What shall I say to him?"

"The less the better."

"Yes, I won't write at all."

So Mr. Wigram was obliged to tell his sister, in black and white, that he hated Mr. Ernest Dormer, and that in regard to Mrs. Ernest Dormer there was a story about, the shadows of which were so dark that he did not care to tell her the whole; but he hinted at the leading points, and he expressed a decided opinion that his sister should ascertain the truth before continuing to visit at any house where the Dormers were received.

"Ah! that's something like," said Julia De Gully. "That note will be worth money to me

some day when my affectionate brother is inclined to neglect his poor Julia. But fancy his pretending not to like to tell me any thing after giving me that batch of his French novels. I think men are all fools."

Whether introduced by questions by Mrs. De Gully, or any other way, it is certain that several persons in Naybury very soon afterward knew that before Mrs. Dormer's parents came there, or afterward, Magdalen had forgotten herself to such an extent that Mr. and Mrs. Conway were glad to marry her to the first man who offered; that they accepted Mr. Dormer though he was notoriously a *roué* and deep in debt; and that he made the match on condition that his wife should reside under the roof of her parents, that they might be responsible for her conduct. That her affections had been bestowed upon a person of very low rank, who had been convicted of crime and transported, and that but for an enormous sum of money paid by some friends of the Conways Magdalen herself would have been publicly connected with the prosecution of her lover. That was the composition of the air which was infused into the quiet atmosphere of Naybury.

Of course nobody mentioned any thing of the kind to the persons principally interested, or gave them the slightest hint that their characters were at stake. That is not the way in respectable society. Among the inferior class the case is different, and a coster-monger's wife does not suffer under a scandal because her friend the groceress has too much delicacy to inform her that her good name is impeached by the butcher. Revelation and retribution are prompt in that sphere. But people walked about Naybury, and met Mr. Conway, and hoped that he did not suffer from the hot weather, and met Mrs. Conway, and trusted that her fruit had not been injured by the rains, and met Magdalen Conway, and thought how very much good her Scottish trip had done her, and then they went on, and wondered when the shell would explode which they were certainly not going to be the persons to fire, though, if half of what was said were true, it was really not the thing for the Conways to walk about and visit as they did. They should have the good sense, if they had not the good feeling, to know that the truth must have got wind, and that they were causing great pain to their friends by remaining in society and incurring the danger of an exposure which would bring shame to all. And if a quarter of what was said were true, and there must be some foundation for such reports, surely it would be better, especially as they had plenty of money, to withdraw to some place on the Continent instead of risking a terrible exposure.

One of the first persons to whom Mrs. De Gully proceeded to impart such hints as she thought would be efficacious for her purpose was Mr. Chervil, with whom, as has been said, she held a somewhat friendly relationship, considering their positions. The lady condescended to be rather explicit in stating her desire that Mr. Chervil should ventilate the subject as much as he could. Mr. Chervil contrived, without exactly promising any thing, to convey to Mrs. De Gully the impression that he would circulate the scandal far and wide, and she smiled at her diplomacy as she left him. Had she looked round she would have seen a smile on his face also. For Mr. Chervil liked the Dormers as much as he was capable of liking any body connected with hateful Naybury, and he resolved that not a word to their prejudice should proceed from his lips. As he was in an attitude of normal cynicism as regarded society, he inclined to believe it probable that there was something in the story, but besides his liking for its subjects he would at any time have done his best to stifle any rumor that could amuse or delight his neighbors. Chervil, in fact, was very ill affected toward the place, and secretly rejoiced in any humiliation that came upon it; and once, when some sneering reference had been made to Naybury in the House of Commons, where the town obtained the distinction of being called miserably backward, ignorant, and unhealthy, Mr. Chervil showed the newspaper report to every body, and even, under pretense of indignation, caused it to be reproduced in every journal in the county. So that his lips, had they not been sealed for a better reason, would have been hermetically closed upon any story that could give pleasure in the locality he detested.

He made one exception only. By some means which, if Mrs. De Gully could not explain them in detail her friend Francine probably could, the Reverend Edward Grafton received a note, in which his attention was called to certain reports prevalent in London and in Naybury in reference to two persons at whose marriage he had assisted. He was enjoined caution, but was told that Mr. Chervil could give him some insight into the matter.

Edward Grafton immediately fastened upon an idea, which of course was a wrong one, but which it was not unnatural for him to adopt. He remembered his own impressions of Ernest Dormer's character before marriage, impressions which had justified him, as he thought, in addressing to Magdalen that solemn warning which had offended her so much and weighed with her so little. Then, with a certain sense of shame, and yet not without some satisfaction, of which he felt that he ought to be still more ashamed, Edward Grafton recalled the conversation with Mrs. Faunt, and the assurance she had given him that circumstances existed which, if known, would have prevented his union with Miss Conway. Mr. Grafton, although he had conquered himself for the time, and had made his way as he best might out of the mud into which he had been lured by the evil Mrs. Faunt, had never conquered his passion for the woman he had lost. Her husband could never be any thing to him but an enemy, and the most hateful of enemies, one who had intended him no wrong and given him no right to be revengeful. "Now," thought Edward, "the truth has come out. And what next? Magdalen is, or is about to

be. very miserable." Man is a bundle of contradictions, if it be not profane to say so, and the wise who try to reconcile them are fools. It is certain that Edward loved Magdalen, and that he was not sorry that she was likely to fall into affliction.

He would know about it, at all events, and he paid an early visit to Mr. Chervil, and showed him the note.

"Of course," said Edward Grafton, "a writer of an anonymous letter is a miserable creature, and such communications deserve to be treated with contempt."

"That," said Mr. Chervil, with the slightest curl of his intelligent lip, "is no doubt the right thing to say. Honest men owe it to themselves and to society to say so. The next thing is to see what can be got out of an anonymous letter."

"The hint points in a direction which I can not mistake," said Grafton; "and that is the only reason why I should take the trouble of attending to it."

"We need mention no names," said the chemist, "but it is well not to avoid an *error personæ*."

The Reverend Mr. Grafton looked up as if he thought that a tradesman had no right to quote Latin, but forgave the impertinence on reflecting that the man's trade made him largely acquainted with that language. It was not for Chervil, however, to tell a clergyman and a gentleman how to allude to a lady.

"I have attended at no marriage, except among the lower orders," said Mr. Grafton, "since the wedding of Miss Conway."

"Is that, then, the direction you refer to?" said Chervil.

"Certainly. And I am deeply grieved that any thing should have occurred to annoy her."

"Had you heard any thing of the kind before receiving this note, may I ask?"

Edward Grafton colored. But he was not going to be questioned by the tradesman he had come to question.

"Nothing worth repetition."

"Well, I have heard nothing worth repetition."

"The writer of this note evidently thinks the contrary."

"He, or she—for I see it is a female's writing—and I must retain our separate opinions," replied Mr. Chervil, calmly. "If any thing disadvantageous to a worthy person is to be told there will be plenty of persons to tell it, and I dare say plenty who will be glad to hear of it; for we all have our enemies."

"I am not so certain about the worthiness," said Edward, incautiously.

"You grieve me much, Sir. I had the highest opinion of the lady."

"Lady!"

"I am sure that she deserves the name; at least I should be very sorry to think otherwise."

"But we are at cross-purposes, Mr. Chervil. I made no allusion to a lady."

"Except that you named her, Sir, and said that the hint in this note pointed in a certain direction. I am truly glad to have misunderstood you."

"I do not think," said the Reverend Mr. Grafton, "that you or any body else will hear me say — or tolerate — any objectionable reference to Mrs. Dormer. To correct a mistake, which I can not understand, I had better say that I alluded to Mr. Dormer."

"To Mr. Dormer!" said the chemist. "Ah, you do not think so well of him as you could desire to do?"

"I have my own impression of his character, certainly," said Edward Grafton, who was disconcerted at finding that he was making no way at all with the impassive Mr. Chervil, and was placing himself in the undignified position of a gentleman who had stooped to ask for scandal and who was denied it.

"My opinion of him, *valeat quantum*," said Mr. Chervil (who had not failed to notice Mr. Grafton's silent protest against Latin from the counter), "is a high one; but many high opinions have to be modified, and of course I should change mine on good cause shown."

Grafton's impulse was to observe that Mr. Chervil's opinion was of no consequence; but the young clergyman recollected that if he wished to hear any thing from the chemist that sort of remark was not calculated to advance his business.

"I speak to you in confidence, Mr. Chervil," said Edward, making, as he thought, a tremendous condescension, which deserved more of a bow than the chemist made in return. "I quite agree with you that as a rule this sort of thing" (taking up the note) "should be left unnoticed."

"Pardon me for interrupting you," said Mr. Chervil, "but I expressed no such opinion. I merely observed that it was the right thing to say. As a philosopher I should take any hint that seemed to be of use, whether signed or not, just as if I were walking in the dark and a voice told me my way I should not refuse to listen because the owner did not begin by bawling out his name and address. But I speak as an humble person. Ladies and gentlemen know nothing of anonymous letters or unworthy means of getting at secrets."

He said this respectfully, but he looked so steadily at Edward Grafton while saying it that again the latter colored, and to the honest sense of shame was added the angry suspicion that Mr. Chervil had heard something about the Faunt mission. This was not the case, and Edward's conscience was punishing him in that matter. But Mr. Chervil had heard of Edward's interview with Magdalen, and his protest against the marriage, and had heard it in a way which shall be explained. However, Mr. Grafton had only to get out of the situation as he best might, and he took the bull by the horns.

"You are quite right, Mr. Chervil. At all events, there are circumstances in which a man must be a law to himself, and if he thinks that he can do good by availing himself of means which he dislikes—"

"He may consider the end justified by the means," said the merciless chemist. "Or," he added, not wishing to drive Edward out of the field, "he may say, with an old divine doubtless well known to you,

'Who disdains
To pick out treasures from an earthen pot?'

What is it that you desire to know, Mr. Grafton?"

"I own that I should like to know what this note alludes to," said Edward, fairly forced into asking a tradesman for scandal.

"But if I tell you that it really does not affect a gentleman at all you will no longer take any interest in it. Well, so far as it has been revealed to me, it has nothing to do with Mr. Dormer's character or conduct."

"Are you certain of this?" said Edward, ready for our usual quarrel with information we dislike.

"Quite."

"I suspect that you have not got the whole story, then," said Grafton, almost rudely.

"That is most probable. Who ever does get a whole story? But in no part of the story which I have got is there any thing about the gentleman whom you think unworthy."

The repetition of his own word increased Edward's irritation.

"You need not repeat to any one that I said so," he replied; but, recollecting himself, he added, "not of course that you would do so; but to tell you the truth, I have had so much annoyance from an unguarded expression which I used in a hurry that it makes me needlessly cautious."

This was the way to touch Mr. Chervil, who liked to torment any person who defied him, but who became gentleness itself when the antagonist threw himself on mercy.

"I would pretend not to know what you mean, Sir," he said, kindly; "but you would be sure that it was pretense. And I was so heartily glad—if I may be allowed to say it—that you did say what you mention, that I am afraid I have made ill-will for myself and given offense by echoing your words. I allude, of course, to the missionaries being eaten."

"Confound the missionaries!" said Edward, but actually looking round as he said it. He had certainly suffered almost enough for one of his offenses against decorum.

"Many of them are good men, too, Sir," said Mr. Chervil; "that is, until they have been manipulated by those who make religious capital, and worldly capital also, out of their labors. I happen to know a good deal more about them than it would have been good for my business to tell on the platform the night that man Yotes was lecturing here. I knew something about him, too, but it wouldn't have done for me quite to pass by the begging-plate, though it has come to my ears that I might have saved my sixpence, for it got me no *kudos* at all with the religious ladies."

"Greek, too," thought Edward; "we shall have Hebrew next." He might have had it if Mr. Chervil so pleased; for whether the Reverend Mr. Grafton could read a verse of the original book of inspiration or not, Chervil, the chemist, could there and then have given him instances of all the seven conjugations from kal to hithpael.

But Edward's business just then was to get at the news, whatever it might be, for he was an obstinate man; and, in spite of Chervil's assurance to the contrary, persisted in retaining his belief that Ernest Dormer's conduct was in some way connected with the mystery; and he bore with the chemist's condolence, approbation, and learning in a way befitting a Christian minister under unmerited affliction.

"I am glad that a sensible man understands what I said, and looks at the matter from a right point of view. I don't allege that those who believe that emissaries should be sent out at a great cost to black savages, while not an effort is made to rescue white savages at home, have not certain reasons which they think of force; and I don't at all charge them with being hypocritical. But my views are of no consequence just now, and I only mention them because you can appreciate the difficulty in which I carelessly placed myself, when, being known to have such ideas, I hastily said something which only meant that I was in a great hurry. But in reference to this communication from this unknown person; are you disposed to tell me what it means?"

"You have been frank with me, Mr. Grafton, and I thank you. I will be as frank in return as I ought to be. There are scandals spreading over Naybury, and they affect the character of the lady whom we will not mention. I believe them to be lies, scattered for a purpose. I am certain that the person who brought them to me was doing somebody else's errand, though but doing it unwillingly."

"Will you tell me who it was?"

"I would rather not do so now."

"But will you say whether it was man or woman?"

"Woman," said Mr. Chervil, after a pause.

"But not a lady?"

"No," said Mr. Chervil; "any thing but a lady. And that is all I think it right to say at present. I am in the hands of a gentleman."

"Yes," said Edward Grafton, "do not be afraid of my injuring you by repeating any thing you have said to me; but I am, of course, unfettered as to my course of action. I believe that I know your informant, and I will muzzle her."

"Mind she does not bite while you are doing it; that is a way with animals of her class."

"Yes, it is," said Mr. Grafton; "but I think I know how to manage. Meantime I am sure that you will repeat nothing."

"I don't know that you have found me very indiscreet, Sir. Perhaps you will let me say something more. I advise you not to be the means of making the scandal more talked of than it would otherwise be. At present it is in the

hands of persons of no—of no social condition; but if it is taken up by a clergyman—especially a man of family, like yourself—the better class must notice it one way or the other, and the mischief which was intended will be done."

"That is good sense, Mr. Chervil," said Edward, to a man of twice his age and ten times his wisdom. "I am glad to find that you see matters in the right light. Don't be afraid of my doing harm."

"I am not, because it is done," said Mr. Chervil, looking after Mr. Grafton as he went down the street. "That is an able man, just the person one would select as a guide in what we are told to consider so important. I think I have done some good. If I had not said what I did, he would have shown the letter to somebody else. No, he would not, for he has left it here; more clerical wisdom. I seem to recognize the style of the paper; I have certainly had notes of this shape. It is squarer than the usual sort; I will compare it when I have time. Ah, he has missed it!"

Edward hastened back to ask for the note, which he supposed that he had left upon the counter; but it appeared that he had not done so, nor could the united researches of himself and Mr. Chervil discover it.

"I hope that I have not dropped it in the street," said Mr. Grafton.

"I hope not, Sir," said Mr. Chervil. "But if you have, and as my name is mentioned in it, perhaps the finder may bring it to me; if so, I will take care of it."

There are two kinds of men who like to get and preserve letters. One is the class who keep such things for a special purpose, and these may or may not be honest, but they are not fools. The other is the class of fools proper, who think that every incident in their foolish lives is worth illustration by documentary evidence. Mr. Chervil was not of the latter order, at all events.

A reader will scarcely need to be told where Edward's suspicions alighted. The scene which Mrs. Conway had described as having occurred at the Rectory had prepared him for any act of wild wrath on the part of Mrs. Faunt. That scene had been truly stormy, and we may be glad to have to do with it only at second hand. Mrs. Faunt had been to Saxbury Rectory, and had conducted herself in the way that Mrs. Conway had heard. The event would not have occurred but for an unfortunate failing of which Mrs. Faunt had never been able to divest herself, though it had been her bane upon so many occasions that a clever woman might have been warned against it. During her earlier residence in Naybury parish she had indeed striven with some success against her weakness; but it had been too strong for her during her visit to London, where she had met with sundry discouragements and reverses which seemed to justify her in seeking consolation of a stimulating kind, and she had brought back with her the re-adopted habit, and the means of indulging it more pleasantly than the resources of the locality enabled her to do. And on one evening, when a wet and tempestuous day had confined her to the cottage, and to moody meditation over her wrongs and troubles, as she called and probably thought them, Mrs. Faunt had comforted herself up into such a state of excitement that she had gone off impulsively to the Rectory, and given the startling information that the younger Grafton owed her money for secret services, and that unless she were paid the universe should be made acquainted with their nature.

She had not quite known with whom she had to do, but information on that point was conveyed to her with considerable promptitude and emphasis. Edward was away, and the allegation was made, therefore, to his father, the terrible Rector, his mother, and Mr. Abbott, whom Mrs. Faunt had graciously recognized as a fat old thief of a lawyer, and had permitted to listen or not, as the staring old prig preferred. She stated her case, in which Mrs. Grafton, with motherly indignation, declared there could not be a word of truth. Mr. Abbott had his own ideas, recollecting certain points in Edward's manner upon two or three occasions. What the Rector thought may not be of importance, but what he said was greatly to the purpose. He had, like Mrs. Faunt—if we may compare a dignified clergyman of the Church of England with a dreadful low woman of a dirty cottage—been considering his wrongs and troubles, as he called and probably thought them, and the result was a state of temper which boded no good to the first person who should cross him that night. For her sins, it was Mrs. Faunt—upon whom the Reverend Theodore Grafton immediately opened so tremendous a fire of commination, delivered in the most thunderous tones of his magnificent organ, and conveying to the astounded woman such denunciations of earthly and heavenly wrath, but more particularly the former as exemplified in the tread-mill, that he literally roared her into something like a fit, unrecovered from which, and still under the thunder of the sacerdotal guns, she was shoved out of the house and into the road, the Rector menacing a similar vengeance on any one who should dare to succor her. Mrs. Faunt had no distinct recollection of getting home; but that she had done so at some time, in difficulties, she learned from finding herself on her bed in the cold morning, wet, muddy, and shivering. Never had such a moral and physical tempest descended upon her simultaneously. Her opinion of the clergy we have been obliged to hear upon more than one occasion; but her contempt for the body was thenceforth exchanged for a different feeling in regard to a single member of the Establishment, of whom she retained an indelible impression, created in the moment of her own obscuration and his rage, and one which connected him with her superstitious idea of the Personage to whom he was professionally bound to be most unlike.

But little had been said to Edward Grafton upon the subject. His mother had affectionately

assured him that not for a moment had she lent credence to the vile woman's story, and his father affected to take its falsehood for granted, but avoided further reference to the subject; Mr. Abbott had, in a friendly way, hinted to Edward that persons of Mrs. Faunt's type were dangerous and troublesome, and that if he had any reason to apprehend further molestation it might be well to take some active measure for getting rid of her, to which Edward Grafton had replied by a few words which meant that he could say a great many, but as he chose to be silent Mr. Abbott had no alternative but to imitate him. The information which Edward had received from Mr. Chervil led the former to the belief that Mrs. Faunt, raging with vengeance, had determined to do mischief to somebody, and would speedily involve him in the consequences of any injury to the Dormers. Mr. Chervil, having replied in the negative to the question whether the informant were a lady, had removed any doubt that existed in Grafton's mind, and there he was once more in antagonism with the evil Mrs. Faunt.

He determined to see her. He wondered that she had never sent for him. For though the Rectory had repudiated the bargain between her and himself, and had blown her away from its guns, the bargain existed, and Edward had been quite disposed to fulfill it. He thought that he had arranged with Charity Faunt that the payment he made at their last meeting was to suffice for the time, and that the remainder of the money was to be paid as she might require it. And so matters had been left peacefully enough, and so they might have remained but for Mrs. Faunt's unfortunate habit of comforting herself.

Yes, he would go and see her. This time, at least, he had nothing to be afraid of. Treason had done its worst, or nearly so. In fact, it had done the worst it was likely to do unless treason became madness, for to reveal any more than Mrs. Faunt had done was to deprive the secret of its market-value.

Besides this, he had a right to go and remonstrate with her on her behavior at the Rectory. She had been guilty of a clear breach of faith, and had thus given him a vantage-ground, whence he hoped to act with more success than in his previous engagements. But what was he going to say?

Well, he had time to consider that as he went along. He did not very well know what he wanted to say; but the point he had to gain was that Mrs. Faunt should instantly cease from putting about slanders touching Mrs. Dormer.

He found Mrs. Faunt at home. More than that, he found her exceedingly respectful, not to say humble. She was perfectly sober, and reasonably tidy; and when she offered him a chair, and did not take her own place on a stool until he had sat down, the reception was much more like that due to a clergyman when visiting a poor parishioner than any which Charity Faunt had yet vouchsafed to her clerical friend.

"Well, Mrs. Faunt, and what could have taken you to the Rectory that night?" said Edward Grafton, encouraged by her mildness.

"Please don't speak about it, Sir. It was a mistake," said Charity Faunt, casting down her eyes.

"Yes, it was a mistake, Mrs. Faunt, and something worse. I have no wish to get up a new quarrel, and I believe that you were somewhat severely spoken to by the Rector—was it not so?"

"He gave me his mind, Sir. I am not saying that he had not a right to do it, after my forcing my way into his room at that time of night, though what I said to him I declare I don't know."

"Don't you?" thought Edward, who believed that he saw his way to an advantage. "I can tell you what you said, if you like. But we will speak of that presently. I should like to know your reason for breaking up the arrangement which we came to, and which seemed to satisfy you so completely."

"You consider it broken up, Mr. Grafton, don't you?"

"Why, if you agree to be paid for keeping a secret, and you tell the secret, I don't see that you can expect your pay. What do you say?"

"It must be as you please, Sir, for I don't know what I said to your father and mother. If it's over, it's over."

"Yes, that's all very well, but what do you think of your conduct toward me? I behaved well enough to you, as you can not deny."

"We won't go into that, if you please, Sir," said Mrs. Faunt, humbly. "I am quite agreeable that by-gones should be by-gones, and that you shouldn't darken my door any more. I have been the loser. I have not hurt you that I am aware of, but if I have I am very sorry. And so, Sir, you will be so good as to let the stupid matter drop."

"Mrs. Faunt," said Edward Grafton, "I know enough of you by this time to be pretty sure that you are playing a part, and that all this quietness and humility are assumed."

"Perhaps, being the Rector's son, you never had the ill-luck to stand, or at least to try to stand, before him when he was raging at you like a wild bull. If you had, Sir, you would know that he is enough to scare the senses out of you for one while. I am not timider than another, but I have not got over that sermon yet. Besides, I caught cold, and I am very ill. Maybe you would not mind going away now, and coming to see me again when I am more fit to talk to you?"

"If you are ill, Mrs. Faunt, it is my duty to pity you, and I do so, in a sense. But your illness you brought upon yourself, and you must consider it as a punishment. You are not very ill—I am in the habit of seeing sick people, you know."

"I did not know it, Sir," said Charity, quite quietly; but Edward recollected that she had before reminded him that his pastoral visits were not exactly the business of his life.

"Ah," he said, sharply, "you are well enough and keen enough to hear what I say and to understand it. Don't let us waste time. You have spoiled your own game as regards myself by revealing my folly to the only persons from whom I wished to hide it."

"I did that, did I, Sir?" she asked, penitentially.

"Do I not tell you that you did? You say you were not in a state to know what you said to my father and mother. I learn from them what you did say, namely, that I sent you to town for the purpose of obtaining evidence against Mr. Dormer in order to prevent his marriage."

"I went and said that, did I, Sir?"

Her rather pertinacious questioning did not please Edward, but it was his nature to hold on to what he thought was a success.

"How many more times am I to say so?"

"It's very sad, very sad indeed, Mr. Grafton; but it's a comfort to me to know that your parents think none the worse of you for it, and that your father, terrible gentleman as he is, allowed you to mount his pulpit all the same."

"A son's errors are easily forgiven," said Edward, reddening, but hoping that in the gloom of the cottage the manifestation would not be observed.

"Very true, Sir; and now might I ask what you wanted to say to me? After what I did you may be sure that I should not have sought after you if you had not sought after me."

"That I believe. You had done with me. But you are at other work, Mrs. Faunt, and I am come here to ask you to leave it off."

"If you would be so good as to tell me what it is, I might, Sir. Lord knows that I am not much given to work, and never was; better for me, I suppose, if I'd ever seen the blessedness you gentlemen tell us there is in what you call, for all that, the curse of labor. But I never did. I believed it was meant for a curse, as it was called, and I always found it an uncommon hard one."

"You are trying to talk me away from the matter, but it won't do. I know the game which you are playing now, though I don't see what you are to get by it."

"Then, Sir, you may be quite sure I'm not playing any more than I'm working. I never work or play either, unless something is to be got by it."

"I only say I don't see how. I make no doubt you do. Don't pretend not to understand me, but tell me whether you will leave off, and whether you want any thing for doing so."

"As I'm a living woman I don't understand you, Sir, unless you mean the drink, and that it is my intention to leave off entirely as soon as I am well enough to."

"Drink! Do you think I care whether you drink or not?—that is to say, except as a clergyman who is bound to tell you that it is wrong. Drink yourself into *delirium tremens*, if you like," added the clergymen, non-officially.

"You're very good, Mr. Grafton, and I am sure you speak the truth when you say you wouldn't care. But if you don't mean that, I might as well be the blind nigger in the cellar trying to find out what o'clock it is by the sundial."

"Do you mean to deny that you are spreading slander about the character of a lady of Naybury?"

"Yes, it's true; but then it's my own character," said Mrs. Faunt, with provoking mildness and a sort of despair. "I am publishing myself for a bad one, I know that."

"And you are a bad one," said Edward, angrily; "but do not play with me. I may make you an offer in place of the agreement which you chose to break; but then I must know all that you have been doing and how far the mischief has spread. Confound it, Mrs. Faunt, we have had to speak plainly to one another before this—what's the use of humbug?"

"You know better than me, Sir, as most gentlefolks use the article spontaneous, and poor folks only when they go in for plunder."

"As you think you are doing now. Well, name your terms."

"For what, Mr. Grafton?"

"For telling me all that you have done in the way of slandering Mrs. Dormer, and for leaving it off for the future."

Mrs. Faunt looked at him keenly.

"There is a plant here," she said, with a good deal of her old insolent manner. "I see. Have you got any body listening outside? No, it's too early times for that. I am to be lured within ear-shot afterward. I understand. And then I, being a tipsy, disreputable woman, who have made one false charge, am to be laid hold of for another, and then the magistrates will lay their heads together, and I shall be got out of the way, right or wrong. I have known a little of what country justices can do when it has been for the good of respectable folks that some one should be run down to death—perhaps I have had a hand in that sort of thing myself. But it will not do with me, Mr. Grafton. I am too old a bird to be caught in that way, as you might have known. So I have been slandering Mrs. Dormer, have I? It's a lie. If there's one person in all Naybury I would stand by, it is that lady; for she is about the only lady who has never insulted me. You made a bad pick when you chose her name to fix your lie on, Sir."

"Becoming language, Mrs. Faunt!"

"It's suitable to the occasion, Mr. Grafton; and if it isn't I don't care."

"There is not the least ground for your suspicions, and if there were a reason to wish you got rid of, which there is not so long as you conduct yourself decently, I dare say that the magistrates could find a better way of clearing the place of you than by the disreputable course you speak of. Be good enough to dismiss such a notion from your mind, and speak like a woman of sense. I don't believe in your denial, and you had much better tell me what I ask for.

Go out and search, if you like, and see whether I have any witnesses lurking about."

"And I will, too," said Mrs. Faunt, who had the faculty of getting into a rage at short notice, as we have seen.

She went out angrily, and looked round the cottage, not perhaps that she really expected to find any body, but because it was in her nature to carry out any piece of angry folly to the end.

Not finding any one she returned, and glanced at her bed with a curious expression in her face. Edward, of course, could not translate this look, but it might have had reference to a witness of her own, who, on Grafton's last visit, had been made available.

"That doesn't seem part of your trick, Mr. Grafton, and I suppose you mean to rely on your being believed yourself when you go away and swear that I owned to you what you say. We shall see, we shall see."

"Very well," said Edward. "Be as obstinate as you like. But if you are left here in peace and quiet, and no steps whatever are taken against you, I suppose that in time you will come to the belief that none were ever intended. And when you tell me so I shall be ready to talk to you again."

"You will talk to me just when I choose, Sir; and when I choose to send to you to demand more payment on account of what you owe me, I expect the proper answer."

"After your conduct at the Rectory? That closed the old account, as I have told you over and over again, and as you allow."

"Is that so, indeed, Sir?" said Charity Faunt. "I had rather built upon that money to live respectable on. But as you say it is lost, I suppose it is. There is only one thing which I must do, for, bad as I am, I can feel shame and sorrow for my sins."

"What is that, Mrs. Faunt?"

"I must write a letter to your respected father and your dear mother, saying how sorry I am for having caused that disturbance the other night, and telling them that though you entrapped me into trying to get evidence against Mr. Ernest Dormer, and I did so, I never let you have it, so that no harm was really done. I will write the letter, Sir, and I would ask you to take it, only I know that gentlemen are apt to forget to deliver such things; but I will take care that it is read by the Reverend Mr. and Mrs. Grafton. It is the least I can do for you."

"I beg that you will do nothing of the kind," said Edward, feeling particularly disconcerted.

"It can not do any harm, Sir, and at least it will show a good meaning."

"The less you have to do with the Rectory the better," replied the clergyman, peremptorily.

"But you must please to allow me to take my own way, Sir, especially as the consequences, if there are any, can fall on me only."

"You don't know that. You may increase the mischief which you have already done."

"How can I, Sir, if they know all about the business? It is only making an apology."

By this time, Edward Grafton, though not particularly clear-sighted, perceived that he had not duped the woman before him, and he racked his non-inventive brain for a new reason that should dissuade her from what she proposed. But nothing occurred to him, and Mrs. Faunt, after a pause, said, quietly:

"It's not for the like of me to interfere with the arrangements of my betters. If Mr. and Mrs. Grafton have made it all right with their son, in spite of the shocking things which I am told I let out, the least he can do is to make it all right with me, and let matters be as they were before."

"So that I am still in your debt, Mrs. Faunt?" asked Edward, who saw that he had no chance.

"Just so, Sir, and we will let the wigging go for nothing."

If the Rector could have heard the word she applied to his terrific anathema!

"Perhaps it may as well stand so," said poor Edward. "Let me know when you want money. But mind what I say about the other affair, and stop what I have asked you to stop. It shall be to your advantage, I promise you. And now good-day, but think of what I have said. I have never done you any harm, and you may gain by obliging me."

"I may, and I will," said Mrs. Faunt, as she scornfully watched the inglorious retreat of the defeated clergyman. "Trust him! Not a bit of it. That was a good dodge, too, to make me try to believe that I was so far gone that night as to spoil my game by letting out too much. I was a great fool, but I know exactly what I did say; and I don't know that I am very sorry I said it, though that bellowing parson was too much for my nerves. Perhaps I shall be able to say something to him one of these days, and if I don't, hard words break no bones, or I should have been killed many a year ago."

The exemplary woman paused, and perhaps revolved certain stormy passages in her life when indignation had been poured upon her by some who had a right to be wrath at her amiable offices.

"No, they break no bones," she repeated. "It is when a person looks white, and stares with his hot eyes, and then comes across the room like a flash of lightning, and there you lie in a heap, waiting to feel his heel—yah!" she exclaimed, as if resisting a suffocating sensation. "That's worth being afraid of. But my time for that sort of thing is nearly over and gone. And when I have quite done with my dear Benjamin Dudley, as he calls himself, I think it will be time for me to retire into private life. There's something to be done yet, too. And I'll have this foolish parson's money, and more at the back of it, if only for the sake of bringing him up here with one of his twopenny plots, and sending him away looking like a beaten cur. I have had *my* beatings, but I have had my little vengeances—my nice little vengeances."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CONVALESCENT.

"BETTER to-day, I see," said Mr. Dudley, coming into Mr. Farquhar's room as if he had left his patient in the most amicable manner the evening before; the fact being that the younger man had seen or heard nothing of Mr. Dudley since the stormy morning when George had professed himself unable to meet Dormer. "You will be all right in a few days, and then we must really move you into the country air."

"I don't know whether I am better or not," said George Farquhar, sulkily.

"That means that you want to know whether I have any thing for you to do. Make yourself easy, and be well as you like. I have called in a friendly way to look after you. Let's feel your pulse. So! Tongue? Ah! not bad. Appetite?"

"Not much."

"Not for lodging-house cookery, I dare say. Stale eggs and watered milk for breakfast, and chops half raw, half cinder, for dinner. It is not, perhaps, the diet most calculated to bring on an invalid. We'll get you into a farm-house, where you shall be treated like a human being with gustatory and digestive organs. Meantime you'll find something eatable in this parcel I have brought you. Have you a lock-up place, as what's there is really too good for the young cat that opens the door or the old cat that makes out the bills?"

"Thank you, Dudley, that is kind!" said Farquhar, who was just in that state of convalescence which excuses a person for hating most things and disliking the rest. "Yes, there's a good lock on that chiffonier."

"Ah! Then it probably opens with a flap behind. Does your landlady object to sending for beer, and has she got a large Bible in the front-room? If so, there is certainly a flap. However, eat that up soon, and then there'll be none for the cats. Well, you don't ask me how I got on as your substitute the other day?"

"You've hardly given me time. What did you do?"

"All things considered, my boy, I think it is just as well that you were ill that day. I don't suppose that you would have been able to get through the interview. I had not expected the pleasantest of conversations, of course; but things came to a point which was nearly personal."

"He was enraged; or what?"

"There was rage, no doubt, but that was not all. He got to a white heat, which may cool, but which, if it doesn't, may be dangerous. However, we wait to hear."

"Did you tell him I was in town?"

"Don't be so frightened. Do you imagine that I would expose a friend to an unnecessary danger? He is not thinking of you? He is thinking of the news he received, and whether it is true or not. The deadly shaft clingeth in his side, as we used to say in our classical days."

"But about my own affair. Have you seen Hobbins again, or heard of him?" said Farquhar, anxiously.

"Yes," said Dudley.

"And is—is any thing to be done?"

"I will calm your mind by telling you this: for some reason, the matter is allowed, for the moment, mind, to go to sleep. But it may be waked at any instant, so do not run into your usual extreme of oversecurity when you are not in a state of overterror. I have got Mr. Hobbins to promise that no step shall be taken without his giving me the earliest notice. This may be very shortly, but we shall have it."

"But I had hoped," said Farquhar, querulously, "that what you were doing in the other quarter would prevent her friends from taking steps at all. I remember you talked about spiking their guns."

"I dare say I did; but things will not always go at the pace we desire. And it is just on the cards, you know—not to frighten you—that the course we are taking with Mr. Dormer may just be the way to quicken the action of Mrs. Dormer's friends. The less they like what he has to say to them the more reason for coming down in thunder on you."

"You are a Job's comforter, you are."

"Don't be profane, George. Besides, the phrase is foolish, like most old phrases. Job wanted very little comfort; he looked at things philosophically. All his children were killed, and he is represented as having been quite compensated by a second marriage and more children. So that his feelings did not demand much consideration."

"Nor do mine, as you seem to think."

"I hate a man to look dismal. Fight, or jump over the bridge, but don't wear a whining expression like that of an Italian organ-man, whom I always wish to kick for looking miserable. But I did not come to row you to-day; I want to have a little serious talk about your future prospects. You can't mean to go on in your present way, doing no credit to yourself, giving no satisfaction to your employers, and drifting on to an examination at which you are sure to be plucked."

"You put things pleasantly."

"I put 'em truthfully, and you can not deny it."

"Let me get well, and then we'll see what is to be done."

"Deuce a bit. This is the time to consider, when your head is reasonably clear. I tell you that I am quite resolved to rehabilitate you—that's a long word, isn't it? and I expect to be listened to, because I have not been a bad friend."

"If you say that, I won't remember that you declared the last time you were in this room that I was flung over forever."

"I said something when I was in a passion, and I may say something the next time I get into one; but the proof of my friendship is that I am here, leaving my place to take care of itself."

"Under the direction of Mr. Spitty, I suppose?"

"No, locked up. I had to wop Mr. Spitty for his good, and he saw it in a wrong light, and has bolted. I hope he will come back, for though he has a beast of a temper, which I am sure he never learned from his master, he knew his work, and I should wop him again and forgive him. Your father is not so indulgent," said Mr. Dudley, suddenly.

"What of him now?" said Farquhar, flushing. "You have not heard from him?" asked the young man, changing color.

"No, no, of course not; but I did not name him exactly by accident, though I might as well have introduced him more gradually. As we have got to him, listen to me, George Farquhar."

"I have so often asked you not to enter on that subject."

"But it is for your good, and I will tread as gingerly as I can. Do be a man of sense. You have evidently some extraordinary terror of this father of yours, and I am not going to ask you what it means; but I have a right to use it as an argument to induce you not to be weak and purposeless. Does your father support you?"

"In a sense."

"Bah! don't speak in that way."

"The people I am with pay me an allowance, not as a salary—I am articled—but the money comes, as it were, from him."

"Much?"

"No; well, if you must know, one hundred a year."

"You don't live on two pounds a week, Mr. George Farquhar. Your music-hall expenses would swallow up that."

"No such thing!" said Farquhar, pettishly; "nor half of it."

"I know better. Remember, I have had my eye upon you. You don't content yourself with three or four glasses of their spirits, which, beastly as they are, are the least noxious things they sell. You are a gentleman, and go in for abominable messes called wines, and you treat persons, chiefly—but not always, Mr. Farquhar—of the other sex. Not always, I know that; and I have told you as much, I think."

"Is this sort of thing part of the friendly visit?" said George Farquhar, going to the window.

"Come back and sit down, and don't be school-boyish, I tell you," said Dudley, in rather a kinder tone. "Yes," he added, as George obeyed, with a weak sort of reluctance, "I am doing my best for you, and I won't be hindered by your petulance. I don't want to remind you again that I have a right to talk thus, but please just bear it in mind when you are inclined to be absurd. Now, my good fellow, it is quite plain to me that you are hopelessly in debt."

"I don't see why you should say hopelessly. I may be in debt, as many men have been before, and will be again. But one can get out of debt as well as get into it."

"Yes, in two ways. One is to white-wash. The other is by making terms with your creditors, and keeping those terms by hard work and self-denial. You're afraid of the first, and unequal to the second."

"How can I work when I'm under articles?"

"Men have worked with their pens, far into the night, and made much money that way, when they could get very little in any other; but I don't say that you can do it. Have you any expectations?"

"None on which I can raise money. There will be something coming to me one day, at a death which—which I hope is a long way off."

"Your father's?"

"No, I do not allude to him. We need not talk about this, for the reason I tell you."

"That money, however, will certainly be yours?"

"I do not even say that. But I do not count upon it."

"Yes, you do, in your weaker moments, of which you have a good many."

"I have never done so," said George, with an earnestness very unlike his usual manner. "And if I chose to tell you the name of the person to whom it now belongs you would understand that I speak the truth."

"I take the liberty of making a guess," said Dudley, "and you can answer it or not. The person is your mother. And I will tell you something more, as you will not tell it to me. You are a good son to your mother."

"It may be so," said Farquhar, with agitation. "Let that subject drop."

"How foolish you are!" said his friend. "Why can not you complete the confidence, and let me help you?"

"Because," said Farquhar, with a heightened color and a certain dignity of manner—"because you are not the sort of friend to whom I can make any confidences again. Listen to me, Dudley, in turn."

The young man, upon whom the thoughts roused by the reference Dudley had made produced a singular effect, giving him for the moment a better and manlier bearing than was his wont, looked Dudley straight in the face, and went on:

"I thought very well of you, Dudley, during the first part of our acquaintance. I believed you a rough, good fellow, working hard for your bread, and not particular about dress and manners, but with a sound heart under all; and you were so unlike myself that I took to you. Since I have seen you in other lights. I'm not complaining. You have made me a tool, and you've got, as you say, such a hold on me that I must do your work. But though I am a weak ass, I am not a low scoundrel, and what I do for you in this infernal conspiracy—that's the right word for it—I do because I must. Don't suppose I do it willingly. And do not bring in any thing that has no bearing on the conspiracy. You like plain language—have you got it now?"

He had spoken courageously and well, but at the end his face grew pale, and showed how the effort had told upon him.

Dudley had listened in silence. But when

Farquhar had done, and was giving evidence of exhaustion, Dudley rose, and with actual tenderness of manner supported the young man to the couch, and then producing a small bottle, mixed some stimulant with water, and held it to Farquhar's lips, supporting him with a strong hand.

"If you always showed so much spirit, my dear George," he said, kindly, "you would not be in difficulties, either of purse or of person. You have not told me any thing I did not know; but you are a good frank fellow to say what you have done, and you have not injured yourself with me."

And he shook hands with Farquhar, who tried to speak.

"No, hold your tongue. You have spoken to the purpose. I shall not keep you in the dark any longer. I tell you plainly that I have discovered the secret of your home story, and the reason of your fear of offending your father. I incline to think that you'll believe me without proof. But I'll give you proof. And that I may do it without wounding your feelings needlessly I will ask you whether you know enough of heraldry to understand the meaning of the bar sinister? There, don't turn red again! More good fellows have borne it than the world knows."

"I see. Another hold upon me," said Farquhar. "But for one thing how soon I would cut myself free!"

"That one thing being your indisposition to break a loving heart," said Dudley, quickly. "The reason is a good one, I think, and, what is more, it will be your excuse to yourself for any thing which you may do for me. I know no excuse which honorable men would think so valid."

The words were not lost upon George Farquhar, but he made no reply.

"We shall work together well enough," continued his Mentor, "now that we understand each other so perfectly. But more of that another time. I want, if possible, to utilize this illness of yours, and for your own benefit. I do not want to lose time, because I am playing for a stake; and if I win, you will see very little more of me, and if I lose, nothing at all. I should like you to put down on paper a list of your debts, and be sure that you do not deceive yourself."

"Not likely."

"Nothing more likely. For by a comfortable strangeness in human nature, we have a facility in banishing the idea of a person whom we dislike, such as a creditor whom we can't pay. We thrust him away and away, and at last we manage to forget his existence, and when he comes up again we feel angry surprise. I have known lots of cases in which fellows, with the best will in the world to make a clean breast of their liabilities, have left out some thundering sum, and declared that they had told all. And I know that those who believed them insincere did them wrong. You stick down every thing. Try down the alphabet; look over your letters; consider your brewer, and baker, and candlestick-maker, and mind nobody slips through."

"And what then, Dudley?"

"Well, then, if you manage well for me in the business to which you put a hard name—and the right one—we will see whether somebody of my acquaintance will not take the debts off your hands, and enable you to start fresh for the examination and for practice."

"Did you ever hear these words, 'I don't care a red cent, or a smaller coin, if there is one, for your prospects in the profession?'"

"You have a good memory, Farquhar," said his friend, laughing, "and that will be invaluable to you in the law. Yes, I said that, and two or three other brutal things; but my object was to make it very clear to you that you must follow my lead. I did not know so much about you as I do now, and I did not respect you so much."

"How did you learn any thing about me?"

"Frankly, in a way which you would not call gentlemanly. If you did you would misuse language. You will find out how when you open that parcel; but don't be alarmed—the documents are carefully divided from the dishes. Nay, sit still. You can look at that after I am gone."

"The prospect you hold out—"

"Say nothing about that either until we have cleared the way. Make out the list of debts, and be ready to attend any appointment I may make for you."

"Give me as much preparation as you can."

"Certainly I will. I will come and talk the matter over, and coach you, as it were, as I suspect you'll have to pay some fellow to do when the examination time comes on. You must be made a lawyer first, and learn the law afterward."

"But I say, Dudley, what sort of an appointment do you mean?"

"Why, I can hardly tell exactly, but its bearings must be in this wise. I told Mr. Dormer, after a good deal of fencing, in which I am bound to say that he showed a very lofty and haughty tact—but he had got something in his head which I had not a chance of getting to understand—I told him, I say, what we had agreed that you should tell him. The only thing was, that as it came to him second-hand—that is, as regards the identification of Mrs. Dormer with the lady at the chambers—he is not so clearly convinced, perhaps, as might be desired. The Andrew Barton business, on the contrary, came direct from me, who saw the poor murdered fellow out of the world, Mr. Dormer probably took in at once. And he has got the locket. I don't think he knew that he was taking it away. You'd have asked him for it; I knew better."

"Yes; I should not have parted with it."

"Being a lawyer. But there are laws of nature which are higher than yours, and I have studied some of them. No matter for that. I am now waiting to hear from him again."

"You think you will."

"It is certain."

"And he will want my evidence."

"He will want the evidence of a young professional gentleman, of unblemished character, who is received in society, and used to be a favorite visitor at Mr. Justice Trailbaston's; and this undeniable witness will inform him that he knew Miss Conway well, and that he saw her at Mr. Vaughan's window at the time of the murder. And if my young friend, when summoned to give this testimony, shall have well considered all that I have said to him to-day, he will give his evidence with some reluctance, but with a straightforwardness which will carry conviction to the hearer. But if the Hobbins party proceed in the mean time we shall want the same evidence, only it will have to be tendered in a different direction. For now that I know why you fear your father it will be for me to take care that your fears are not realized. Now I have talked to you enough; so I will go, and do you ring for your lunch tray, and see whether my provender suits you. Good-by, old fellow, and keep up your spirits, for your own sake and for that of your mother."

And so Mr. Dudley went away, saying a civil word to the landlady, who was at the foot of the stairs, and whom he had described as a thieving old cat.

"It is easy to see," said Mr. Dudley, "that my young friend was kindly looked after;" and he assured the woman that her attentions would not be forgotten by Mr. Farquhar's relatives.

"Glad to hear it," grunted the old woman, as he closed the door. "I never heard of any of his relatives, except his uncle round the corner, where his watch must be at this present moment, or why should he bother me to let him know the right time?"

Mr. Dudley also had his Judd Street reflections.

"What a weak fool he is!" thought Dudley. "That speech he made to me I confess surprised me a bit, but I fancy he must have rehearsed it. I was very glad to hear him speak up so well, because it shows that he'll be able to do it when he has to meet Dormer. If I can only keep him up to the mark. But the finding that out about his mother was a great card. A good thought of mine to call on his employers, and describe myself not only as his doctor but as his intimate friend. And a better thought in theirs to hand me the sealed parcel containing all his diaries and letters, which one of the patrons had taken out of the desk they were obliged to break open, and had fastened up so tight and honorable. And the best thought was mine again, which was to open the packet and examine my friend's papers. What an ass a man is who writes down his worries and his secrets! He is sure to lose the book one day or other—or, at least, to have it read. I soon put this and that together, and I find that he is the son of a fierce old ruffian, whose exact nature, history, and calling I can not make out; but I think he is a silversmith. And this ruffian's wife—only she is not his wife—appears to be a most admirable person, who was probably deceived with the idea that she was married. And now that the elder miscreant has found some new tie he menaces his son with the threat that if he ever gives him the slightest trouble the mother shall be turned out of doors, and the circumstances shall be known. The one strong nerve in George's bundles of weak nerves is his love for his mother. And there will be no need to drive him any more—I can lead him delicately by a gray hair from the *carum caput* of Mrs. Farquhar."

CHAPTER XLII.

EGGS ARE STILL EGGS.

"Well, Lucy, why have you sent for me?"

"You are not angry with me, Walter, are you?"

"Angry? No, of course not; but curious."

"Sit down, then," said Lucy. "I am hard at work, as you see, and I have made no end of money since I saw you last."

"Very glad to hear it," said Colonel Latrobe. "How are Mopes and the Mouse?"

"All right. They will come in, I hope, in time to see you. They often talk about you, and Mopes takes a paper-knife, and rushes down upon the Dormouse, crying out that she is Colonel Walter killing the Sepoys."

"Bless her! Well, and how is her mother?"

"Very well, but not very strong," said Lucy, smiling. "But I have been in much better spirits these last few days. I don't know why. And the next thing I want to say is that I have finished the little present of eggs which a certain friend of mine promised to accept from me."

"That is very good of you, Lucy; but I don't like the idea of your working for me when you can work for yourself."

"You are very selfish, when you know how much pleasure I got out of the work. See here!"

She made him cross the studio and inspect a set of eggs, charmingly tinted, and arranged, not scientifically, but in a much prettier fashion, with mosses.

"Do you know any thing about eggs, Walter?" asked Lucy, laughing.

"Only the domestic article—yes, and the plover's."

"That is usually a crow's. Well, then, I must explain my gift, or its remarkable merits will not be understood. Of course all these are forgeries—I need not tell you that?"

"But they are just as good as the originals, I suppose?"

"Quite, I should think; but that is the purchaser's business. Here I have painted for you the eggs of some rare birds, and I flatter myself that I have done them well. These are the eggs of the red-necked Phalarope; will you remember that?"

"No. You must write it down for me."

"I write such a scrawl. These are of the

fire-crested wren. The next are of the Bohemian wax-wing. These of the Bernacle goose—you'll be sure to recollect that. And these are eggs of the dotterel. And these last are eggs of the small Tengmalmo owl. I only praise them because I would not have you think that I am not giving you the best in my power. It is a very choice little collection of forgeries; and I beg you to accept them."

"I should hurt your feelings, I suppose, Lucy, if—if—"

"If you asked me to tell you what I could sell them for, and insisted on buying them from me at that price. You would hurt my feelings, but not in the vulgar way of talking, because I should know that you understood me, and meant only kindness; but I should be grieved because Colonel Latrobe did not choose to be put under an obligation, even so small, to Lucy Verner."

"I will send my servant for the box this afternoon. Is that an answer?"

"Yes, and a kind one. Now light a cigar, if you like; you know that I don't mind it: hundreds have been smoked in this room. Do you see that little tiny bit of white marble? He screwed that up to lay the ashes on."

"Thanks for leave, Lucy," said Walter, making no reply to the allusion, but lighting his cigar.

"I want you to tell me whether a story is true."

"Many stories are true."

"Yes, they are," said Lucy. "I know one of them. But this is a laughable affair, and concerns an acquaintance of yours."

"Well?"

"Is it true that Ernest has been beating Mr. Henry Wigram?"

"Who told you that?"

"Why, Jimmy Rydon. He roared so that I was really ashamed to be talking to him in the Gardens."

"There was nothing to roar at. It was a mistake, and Rydon might have had the good sense—no, he has not got that—but the good feeling to hold his tongue about it, especially to you."

"Then it is true?" said Lucy, her great eyes shining.

"True enough," said the soldier, impatiently.

"Yes; but I could not get him to make me understand exactly what the quarrel was about. He gave a lumbering account of that, and somehow I fancied that he did not want to tell me."

"He might, perhaps, have had brains enough to see that the less said the better, though he was too great a fool to be able to hold his tongue altogether."

"It was about Mrs. Dormer, I know that."

"Well, then, if Jimmy Rydon told you so much, it was only another piece of his idiotic conduct not to tell you all."

"You will, won't you?"

"When you say about Mrs. Dormer, what do you mean?"

"Why, I suppose Mr. Wigram has been making love to Mrs. Dormer, and Ernest did not approve of it."

"Yes; naturally that is what you would think. There has been no love-making in the case, and Wigram never saw Mrs. Dormer."

"Oh! are you sure?" said Lucy.

"Certain. I understand that tone, too; and it means that you have been indulging in some imaginations of a peculiar character, Lucy. All wrong. Dismiss the subject from your mind."

"Easily said, Walter."

"I read your heart, Lucy; though I have no business to be doing so."

"Read out," she laughed, "and I will tell you whether you know the letters."

"You hoped that a wife had been flirting, and that estrangement had set in."

"And would he not be right to estrange himself from any woman who could think of another man after Ernest had chosen her?"

"Well, nothing of the sort has occurred. I am bound to tell you so, and if I said I was sorry to crush your hopes I should say what was untrue."

"You are so true a friend to him," she answered, "that I am always ready to forgive you for being hard with me. No, you are not exactly hard, but you insist so sternly that things must be as they are, and that feelings must go for nothing. I know that this is quite right, but it is not pleasant. Now don't fidget; you are not going away yet, and I am not going to say any thing to you that might not be repeated at Naybury."

"You have the name pat enough."

"Did I not tell you that I would carry the announcement of the marriage about with me until—never mind. There it is."

And she showed him the cutting from the newspaper. She wore it in a golden locket.

"Yes, these are the things women do," said Walter.

"Yes, Walter, or rather, no. They are only the outward signs of the things women are ready to do. But never mind that either. You might surely tell me some news of the happy couple; there would be no impropriety in that. They must be a happy couple, if he beats people for her sake. What did you say Wigram had done?"

"I did not say any thing. But you may as well know the truth. He spoke lightly in the club about Mrs. Dormer, and in a very few hours afterward Mr. Dormer had chastised him. That shows, Lucy, you perceive, that Ernest is very much attached to his wife."

"Perhaps it does. If a man loved me I would rather that he did not show his love by getting my name talked about all over London; and indeed I should require him to tell me a great many times that he truly loved and respected me after he had done such a thing as that."

Latrobe only growled, for he felt that the woman's instinct had hit the mark.

"You see that I am right, I know. And if

I indulged any of those poor little imaginations which you are so hard upon, I should be delighted at what you tell me, because it shows me that there is no true affection existing. And, then, there is another thing. Mr. Wigram speaks lightly of Mrs. Dormer. How can he do any thing of the kind unless he has some reason? Where there is smoke there is fire. She has never seen him, you say, at least to your knowledge; but she has seen somebody else, and has given cause for talk. How I hate her!"

"This is what I may report at Naybury?"

"No," said Lucy, continuing her vehement little argument; "does it not stand to reason that he does not care about her, and she has cared for somebody else beside him? Walter Latrobe, you will not believe me, but I give you my word of honor that I am shocked and sorry. Not for her. I should be a hypocrite to say that I had any good feeling for the woman who bought him from me, but for his sake, for with his pride to feel that he has made a bad bargain—"

"Lucy, I am not going to hear this sort of thing—you know that I let you chatter to me pretty much as you like: I am a sort of guardian to you, and I hear you as a sort of duty, that I may know which way your thoughts are running; but you really must not slander my friend's wife. There is no ground for any thing like what you infer."

"All right. Men are hypocrites. You know as well as possible that I am talking very good sense, only as I am not a very elegant person, I don't put it into the most superfine words. But I know Ernest Dormer, and what he is feeling at this moment. Walter, don't go over to the enemy, but stand by me. Some good is coming to me; and I shall not forget that it was you who made me know it."

"Not I! Keep your gratitude for Jimmy Rydon. I have told you what, when you come to consider it properly, will make you turn to your eggs again, and resolve not to trouble yourself with the outside world."

"It will make me turn to my eggs, indeed, and work with a will. I made you understand why. Walter, I shall have him here again."

"You can go on talking nonsense until you believe it; but take it from me that you will never have any thing of the sort. She is quite happy, and looking forward to an interesting event."

"You need not have told me that, Walter," said Lucy, with a rush of color to her pale face.

"Yes, it is right that you should know all, because you will be the less inclined to foolish hopes. The birth of the child will bind them together more closely than ever, and you will do very well to remember that."

"I will remember it," said Lucy, smiling again. "And no more about that. Tell me some news of the people one used to know. I have shut myself up so completely that I have seen nobody, and nobody comes to see me. Are you married, Walter? I think you would have told me."

"No, I am not married, nor have I the remotest intention of marrying."

"That is odd, too. I wonder the sight of the exquisite happiness of some of your friends does not make you envious."

"Perhaps it does, but I subdue my bad passions," said Latrobe, lighting another cigar. "I saw Gracie Clare the other day."

"A monkey, she never comes near me."

"She is full of good feeling for you, I can tell you. I don't judge merely from what she said to me, but from things I have heard from Beaumont—you know Beaumont?"

"Yes. I don't care much about him. I think he is a cold and selfish man."

"He is neither. He made a love-match, and is a capital husband. But I know what you mean."

"Love-match! You need not say that to me."

"Well, I don't know that it much matters. But speaking of Gracie Clare, he told me that she had the pluck to fire two or three shots at somebody, and to signify her disapprobation of what he was going to do."

"At Ernest! I should be glad if Miss Grace Clare or Nogg would have been so good as to mind her own business. The idea of her presuming to interfere on my part! She meant well, I know, but fancy Ernest's look when taken to task by that little scrap of a ballet girl. If it had been possible, she would have done me mischief by her meddling."

"Lucy, you are what we used to call contrary this morning," said the soldier, looking at her with an amused expression. "Nothing that man does or that woman does is construed by you in a natural way. But I am not scolding you; I have that feeling myself at times, being of a feminine nature."

"No, Walter. I thought you were a woman's friend, but you are not."

"It is the first time I was ever told so. Next you will say I am an enemy to children."

"No, you are not. But I suspect that you like the good ones best; the children that get out of the way, without tears and noise, when it is convenient for their betters to be rid of them."

"Very neat, Lucy. And as we have finished our talk, good-by, and kiss your children, who are very good indeed, for Colonel Walter."

"What a true friend he might be to them, if he liked!" said Lucy.

"He means to be," said Colonel Latrobe, touching her hand and walking out.

It will be seen by those who recollect the young person whom he had left, that her tone had not improved since we last met her. As she has said, she had been living alone, and too much alone. Seclusion is too much for most women, except those of a very high order of mind, as it is called—that is, of unwomanly mind. We are told that it is not—or some thousands of years ago it was not—good for man to be alone, but the masculine animal has developed since that time, and may now in a large number of

cases be trusted with himself. But woman, always designed for companionship, is invariably deteriorated by a solitary life. She had better talk with fools than become half a fool by not talking at all. And if she have a grievance, it would be as wise to shut herself up with a pan of charcoal as with that. It will not asphyxiate her nature, but will poison it less pleasantly. Lucy Verner bore her original bereavement nobly, and though it was highly immoral in her to entertain the hopes which she owned, there was something so plucky, or as the French school would say, so heroic, in her buckling hard to work in order to provide means to support the unrighteous happiness she coveted, that here and there, in this almost immaculate world, a person might be found sufficiently depraved to look indulgently on the wicked little egg-forger. But the months of solitude, the ceaseless murmur, and the ever-recurring speculation as to how—at that moment—*he* was engaged, and with whom—had embittered Lucy, and made her resentful and somewhat defiant. She had never quite comprehended that what had fallen on her was a just punishment for her erroneous life, but she had resigned herself to her loss because it was his gain, and her love for him was as unselfish as love ever is—which may not be saying much. Now, brooding over her tribulation, she had learned to accuse her fate of cruelty, and she herself was growing a little cruel in the contemplation of her supposed wrong. She had better have gone out to suppers with persons like herself, talked nonsense, and drunk Champagne.

"Good guardian," said a voice behind Walter Latrobe, when he had got a few yards from the house.

"Ah! Charley?"

"How is the little lady? Consoled, of course, and as well as could be expected."

"Well, we know what women are, Launceston."

This, by-the-way, is about the most impudent vaunt that can be made, and yet every man makes it as matter of course.

"And who is Ernestus Secundus?"

"No, the throne is vacant. By-the-way, a nice piece of business you and the rest of you have made with Ernestus Primus. What the devil made you go and tell him, and bring on all that row?"

"Somebody would have told him."

"Yes, but perhaps at a better time. You set him on to do one of the most foolish things a fellow ever did."

"I don't say it was not; but who expected it?" said Launceston.

"That's true enough. I wish he had come to me; but I suppose he thought he had had enough out of me."

"How would you have managed?"

"You don't think I would have let the men quarrel over the name of Mrs. Dormer, do you? I would have tried to prevent their quarreling at all; but if their mutual animosity was too fierce to be put down they should have played *écarté* before witnesses, and had a row over that, or gone behind the scenes and insulted one another about the same ballet-minx, or, damn it! their dogs should have fought, and Dormer have struck Wigram for hitting *his* dog, and afterward we should have considered what to do. I am utterly ashamed of the business. I shall leave that Octagon."

"No, no, you won't. We want fellows like you to keep up the tone of it. A good many men have been let in who ought to have been shut out; but don't let men go out who ought to stay."

"What is said about this Wigram affair?"

"Why, it has made the place a nuisance. Every fellow gets you into a corner and begins about it, and every body talks the same nonsense," said Charley Launceston.

"About the thing itself, of course. A heap of idiotic opinions does not make wisdom, except in politics," said Colonel Latrobe (who was a dreadful Tory); "but nobody can have a second opinion about this. But I mean, do fellows talk about the lady, and the origin of stories, and all that? you know what I mean. In fact, is the mischief going on?"

"Knowing the Octagon, my dear Walter, you might answer the question for yourself."

"I suppose you know that there is not a shadow of foundation for any sort of scandal?"

"Of course not; there never is, you know," said Charley Launceston, looking steadily at his friend. "Did I not say so very plainly and pointedly to Wigram, whereby he grew incensed, and finally came to grief?"

"I see, you're like the rest."

"My dear Walter, I'll be the last man to believe any thing wrong in that quarter; that is as much as I can promise. But when the last man but one has been convinced I suppose I may begin to waver. I'll hold out as long as I can. What does the chap say in Tasso?"

"How the devil should I know?" demanded the soldier. "Who was Tasso?"

"What's the good of that affectation, when I heard you talking Italian to Bell Syleham?"

"Not quoting Tasso to her, I know."

"No, but you recollect well enough what the king says after the heathen has challenged the five knights—

'Much I misdoubt, when he his sword has used
On the fourth knight, the fifth will wish to stand excused.'"

"You'll be the last of her knights?"

"Yes, but I won't fight, my dear Don Walter Quixote."

"And I will."

CHAPTER XLIII.

SUSPECTED.

"WHETHER I am going to do right or wrong, Magdalen," said little Fanny Buxton, "I can not tell. But I am sure you will believe that I mean kindly. I can never forget your mam-

ma's behavior to me when things were said about me, and how nobly she brought me through, and how she scolded me. I should be an ungrateful thing if I ever forgot that "

"What a solemn little prelude, Fanny!" said Magdalen, laughing. "I thought you would be certain about the way I should think of any thing you could do."

"Yes, but repeating disagreeable things seems so unfriendly. And it is only because I feel that you ought to be told."

"Please speak out, dear. Are persons saying disagreeable things about us?"

"Indeed they are, and it is wicked," said Fanny. "And I hardly know how to tell you. In fact, I do not understand what is meant. But," she went on, coloring, "it is for you to know that stories are being spread, and you need not be told that there are several persons in Naybury who are not displeased at being able to spread them."

"Never mind that, Fanny dear. Tell me what is being said."

"And that is just what I can not do," said Fanny. "I get nothing but shreds and scraps of things, and they are told to me because people know that I am so much attached to you all; but I can not piece them together into any thing rational, and they worry me so that I can not bear it. I have been as rude as possible to Mrs. Bulliman and Mrs. Mainwaring, and I am not at all sorry for it."

"But what have Mrs. Bulliman and Mrs. Mainwaring to say?" asked Magdalen, smiling.

"No, it was neither of those that hinted most —it was Mrs. Cutcheon, whom I always hated, and she knows it, a spiteful old thing with a cheating husband. I have heard stories enough about herself, I can tell her."

"Yes, but I don't so much care about hearing them, Fanny, if you don't particularly mind."

"No, I know that. It is the only thing about you that I complain of. You have not quite spirit enough to take your own part. And I am an impertinent little creature to say such a thing to you who are so much better than I am."

"Well, dear, perhaps I will pluck up a spirit when you show me that I am being ill-treated."

"Don't you see," said Fanny, coloring again, "how I am keeping away from what I want to say. But it is of no use, and I hope you will not hate me. Is there any story that you would particularly wish were not known in Naybury? I don't mean to ask you that, Magdalen dear. But if there is, and it should have got about, you ought to be aware of it, because you will know how to act, and not be taken by surprise."

And tears came into good little Fanny's eyes as she spoke, which she did tremulously, and with her pretty face in a glow.

"I know of no such story," said Magdalen, simply.

"I am sure of it. I was sure of it, and I told Mrs. Cutcheon that—never mind, I was rude, and that is the truth, but I am very glad. I told her," said Fanny, her eyes glistening between tears and mischief, "that Naybury was a Paradise, serpents and all."

"Certainly that was rude," said Magdalen, laughing in spite of herself.

"Never mind, I tell you. But now that you have told me that you are fearless, they shall all hear something to their advantage when I have an opportunity."

"But, Fanny, I have my share of curiosity. I should like to know something about the reports which have made you so angry—and you are a good child for being so angry for us."

"Well, I don't think I will say any thing now—yes, I will tell you this—it shows what sort of a place this Paradise is. Mr. Dormer came down in a hurry the last time he was here, and you met him at the station?"

"Yes," said Magdalen.

"He staid only a few minutes, they say."

"He could not stay any longer, because the train that brought him was late, and he had to catch the next to London."

"Of course, and I know as well as you do that it was all right. What do you say to being told that you and Mr. Dormer had had a dreadful quarrel, that he rushed from you looking like a fiend, dashed across the road at the peril of his life, and threw himself into the carriage, telling Saunders that he never thought such things would have happened as had occurred that day?"

"Made Mr. Saunders, the station-master, the confidant of his grievances against me," laughed Magdalen. "Well, dear, I don't think that Ernest would do that except under very extreme provocation, which I do not remember giving him."

"But you showed him some writing that made him angry, they say," added Fanny, hesitatingly.

"If so, he kept his anger to himself," said Magdalen. But she did not laugh again.

"Yes, I know that it is the wildest nonsense, but you know what people are when they are determined to believe things against you."

"There is some more, then, Fanny? Why should any one desire to believe an unpleasant story?"

"Yes, there is some more, and you will bring it all to the ground just as easily as you have done the first ridiculous nonsense. I don't like to repeat it—not for any nonsensical reason—but—but—" said Fanny Buxton, not exactly knowing how to phrase her reluctance, which we may say for her was that of a modest English girl, who instinctively kept away from a displeasing idea—"however, I may tell you, in proof of the malice of some of the very good people here, that they hint that—that something has come to Mr. Dormer's ears that happened to you in early days, and that you are going to be separated. My darling Magdalen, don't look so white. What a fool I am! Shall I ring the bell?" said Fanny, darting across to her.

"No," said Magdalen, quietly. "I am better. It was nothing. And there is some water on Ernest's table there. Thanks, dear."

"No, don't thank me. Scold me, for having made you angry by repeating such trash."

"But I was not angry, and you are a kind, good little thing. Of course it is trash, as I suppose Naybury will admit when they see Ernest here with me."

"When is he coming?" asked Fanny, eagerly.

"That is a little uncertain, as he has some troublesome business to manage. Until he does, dear, we will leave Mrs. Cutcheon and her friends to talk, and do not mix yourself up in the nonsense."

"Easy to say, Magdalen, but it is not so easy to hold one's tongue when one's dearest friend is slandered. But I will try to do as you bid me. Are you sure that you are well again. Let me send Anne to you. Or let me stay with you, and send Anne up to mamma with a note."

"You know how glad I am to have you, but papa and I had settled to go for a drive, and he complains that he sees so little of me, and I think I must not disappoint him."

"Sure you are not angry with me?"

"I am angry with you for supposing it."

So Fanny Buxton took an affectionate leave of her friend, and departed. It was long before Magdalen stirred from that sofa. She was living the hardest day of her young life.

A cruel revelation had come upon her.

Ernest Dormer did not love her. Of that she had, in these later days, been all but convinced. We have seen how she had fought against the conviction, and how she had waited and hoped, and at times believed that her own goodness and affection would be repaid.

But it had become hoping against crushing belief. The time had come when she felt that she should have been doubly dear to her husband, and when all the early fondness and attention which he had shown her as a bride should have been hers by a tenderer right. This was the time at which he had chosen to absent himself.

Even that Magdalen might have argued down. It would not have been very hard for a loving heart to make excuses for apparent unlovingness. But what could be said against deeds and words that proved his alienation? He had left her. His letters had been few; he had sent messages instead of writing. He had sought an interview with her, and not a word or a gesture of affection had come from him, and he had left her abruptly. The excuses she had made for him would not satisfy herself.

In this state of mind she had remained for some days. She had been very quiescent—that was her nature. She had begged to be left alone as much as possible, and in that house her wish was law. She had brooded over her trouble, and sometimes it seemed very dark indeed, and at others there came a bright gleam of hope which made her almost happy. She would not believe that her future was to be miserable; that there was to be a baptism of tears for the little being whose varying image was before her blue eyes all day and floated through her dreams all night.

Now, however, came something which threw all previous trouble out of her memory.

Ernest was suspecting her.

Of what?

That would have been the thought of most women. A definite charge, to be met and crushed. But that was not Magdalen's thought. He, her lover, her husband, to whom she had given herself and all the love which he could welcome, he, whose happiness was the object of her life, he, whose child—

He had seized upon some suspicion, and instead of bringing it to her, and looking into her eyes for an answer, had gone away from her, and was working out an explanation without her aid.

It might be favorable to her. It might not. That for the moment was the least of her concern.

She scarcely struggled to form an idea of what his grievance might be. It shaped itself for her, by the assistance of his message when she was to meet him, and his behavior at the station, into something connected with Percy Vaughan; but she had no definite conception of the matter; nor did she endeavor to frame one. The fact that Ernest Dormer was doubting her, and was trying to clear up his doubts elsewhere—

How did she know that?

He might not desire to clear them up. A separation. The word, importing something which had never occurred to the mind of a young wife—something that seemed to mean hopelessness and shame—had been used by Fanny Buxton, and had been used by others. Perhaps it was being used by Ernest Dormer, and he might be working to that end. The idea sent her blood rushing vehemently to her brain, and for a time, and until her heart had ceased its fierce throb, Magdalen was unconscious.

But with returning thought came a calmer view of her situation. It could not be that Ernest was separating himself from her. That wild scandal she was able to reject. Those only who know how true it is that words are things, who have felt that when a fact or a falsehood has been clothed in language it acquires a reality which it lacked before, and that it needs a strong mental effort to thrust it aside, will know what Magdalen had to do with the idea which had been forced upon her.

But she had enough, and more than enough, to deal with in the truth which she had learned for herself. There was no arguing away the fact that her husband was inquiring into her history, and perhaps in a hostile spirit. Yes, assuredly hostile, or he would have inquired of her. Had she ever a secret from him? Had not her own girlish diary been in his hand the instant he had asked for an answer it could afford? Would she not have rejoiced to tell him all—any thing—and did he not know it? And

he was searching out knowledge affecting herself, and doing so in secrecy, and perhaps in sullenness.

Naybury and its scandals, too. What would she have cared for the united voices of Naybury against her if she were leaning on his arm? But he had brought this upon her, and he was not by her side to defend her and to show that he believed in her goodness. She was talked against by the Bullimans, and the Cutcheons, and the Mainwarings, and Ernest was away. This was hard; but it was only the exceeding gentleness of Magdalen's nature that made her feel it at all at such a time, and in the presence of a stronger wrong—a woman as noble, but something harder, would not have felt it while combating with the greater trouble.

He had brought it upon her. There, of course, she wronged him; but she could not know that the slanders which had reached Naybury had preceded his last visit. Had she known what set Wigram's vengeance in action, she would have had a singular compensation for aught that Naybury could do to her.

And now, what was she to do?

Many days had passed, and Ernest Dormer had not written to her. That he was not keeping up communication with the household, and even with herself, it would have been untrue to say. He sent an occasional telegraph message to Mr. Conway, with a word or two for Magdalen, and he said that he was closely occupied. A book was now and then forwarded to her—a journal more frequently. The whole was plain enough to Magdalen—he did not wish to write to her, and yet he felt that he had no right to withdraw the ordinary attentions of a husband. She had said nothing of this to her parents, but they began to understand that something was going wrong, and to be wretched. But Magdalen had, in her quiet manner, made them understand her wish that Ernest Dormer should be met in his own way; that his messages should be answered; that he should be kept informed as to her own well-doing, and that nothing should be done or said to alter the relations which it had pleased him to substitute for the kindness once previously existing. She had written twice; but her notes had only been brief assurances that she was receiving every care, and she had added hopes that his business would soon be completed, so that he might return. For after the scene at the station and her reflections upon it, although she had chidden herself for her rebellious thoughts, and had in some degree subdued them, Magdalen's truthful nature had made it impossible for her to resume the tone of affectionate playfulness which had marked her earlier letters. She waited the return of a better time. But this was before Fanny Buxton's revelation. What was Magdalen to do now?

We need not speak of impulses; for with Magdalen Dormer an impulse, except when it tended to the happiness of others, was an influence which had little power with her. She seldom thought twice when a kindness was to be done, unless the second thought was likely to help her to the better fulfillment of her wish. But when the gratification of her own will was the matter in hand Magdalen might listen to impulse, but it was only that in turn impulse might listen to her. Therefore there was no indignant letter dispatched, with an energetic appeal to her husband's justice, and a warning that unless he altered his course it would be impossible for Mrs. Dormer to see him again.

Yet she wanted to write. She much desired to write. She believed that she could say things which, without offending Ernest greatly, would induce him to reconsider his treatment of a devoted wife, and bring him home to Naybury, when all would be well.

Then pride interposed. What had she done that she should be insulted by suspicion? What was he doing?

Next, Magdalen—(you will love or despise her according to your lights)—turned upon Pride, gave him instant battle, trampled him down, and bid him know that if she forbore to write to her husband it should not be at the bidding of a deadly sin.

"I love him yet," she said, speaking aloud for the first time during that long meditation, "and he shall tell me that he does not love me before he shall know that I believe it."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE PARENTS.

It may easily be imagined that Magdalen had no intention of informing her father or mother of what Fanny Buxton had told her. That they felt that there was something wrong between Dormer and his wife has been said, and Magdalen could not be unaware that they did, but she had silently deprecated discussion on the subject, and there was a tacit understanding that, from day to day, things were to go on in their present course, utterly unhappy as it was. Fanny Buxton's visit had been made when Mr. and Mrs. Conway were out, but its effect was too manifest to be hidden from loving eyes, and after lunch, when Magdalen had withdrawn, Mrs. Conway suddenly said to her husband,

"She has heard something fresh from him! Papa, you were right."

"I was right, dear Mary?"

"Yes, when you doubted over the marriage. He is a bad man."

"We will hope not. But why do you say that she has heard from him?"

"She has been agitated, and once she was near fainting. I was ready to spring to her, but it passed away. Has any one called, Anne?" she said to the servant who had just then came in.

"Only Miss Buxton, m'm."

"Any telegraph message? any parcels?"

"Nothing, m'm."

"Fanny Buxton can not have disturbed her

—a good little thing," said the mother, when they were alone again. "But something has. I must go and have a talk to her."

"Stay, my dear," said William Conway, fidgeting exceedingly, as was his way in time of trouble. He wandered about the room, changed his seat three or four times, beat a tattoo on the window and then on the table, hummed a dismal air, and concluded by a resort to his favorite paper-knife, with which he slapped his knee a great number of times. Any one of these signals of distress would have been enough for Mrs. Conway, but the aggregation showed that her husband was very much disturbed indeed.

"What is it, William?" said Mrs. Conway, quietly, for she always held it her duty to become calm when he was irritated—she was a good wife.

"When you say Fanny Buxton can not have disturbed her—"

But he did not want to talk about Fanny Buxton, and he broke off, and again smote himself with the paper-knife.

"Say it out, William, for I do so want to go to Magdalen."

"I met Edward Grafton."

"Well, you might have met better people."

"He said something to me, and I have been spelling over it ever since, and can make nothing of it."

"Nothing he can say is worth so much trouble," said Mrs. Conway, who was rather a good hater, and remembered old times. Her feelings toward Edward Grafton were not softened by her recollection that he had predicted evil from Magdalen's marriage. It is too much for human nature when the prophecy of a man whom we contemn comes right.

"He spoke kindly and respectfully."

"A hypocrite!"

"May be so. I think not. But his words were curious. After we had spoken of ordinary matters—the crops, the new cottages, and Lord Mazagon's gout—you know the Naybury budget—we were parting, when he said, holding my hand, 'Whatever reports may be put about Naybury, Mr. Conway, friends of our Rectory may always be sure that such things have no credence there.' And before I could ask him what he meant his long legs had taken him out of hearing."

"Edward Grafton said that, William?" said his wife, more disconcerted than was usual with her under most annoyances.

"Yes; what do you make of it?"

"At any other time," said Mrs. Conway, in a low voice, "I should have said that it was a bit of Mr. Edward Grafton's blundering, and I should have told him that friends of his Rectory, as he calls them, have most reason to be scandalized at what goes on inside it. But it is very strange that he should have said that to you. Yesterday I met Mrs. Mainwaring, who is usually only too ready to talk, and she passed on with a very cool bow. Presently I met Mrs. Fanshaw."

"She would do nothing rude."

"No, certainly not; but she asked after Magdalen, I am sure, four if not five times, in different ways, and seemed so very desirous to know how she was that I could not help noticing it; and then she sent Magdalen her love, and a message that above all things she was to keep up her spirits, and mind nothing that any body said. At the time I thought of this only as Mrs. Fanshaw's merry, saucy way of talking; but I believe that there was more in it. Ernest's absence is getting spoken about."

"Not only his absence, Mary. That rush of a visit, when the poor child went to the station to see him for three minutes, and came back—you know how—that has been spoken about."

"How do you know?"

"Beccles stopped me as he was going his rounds, and said that he had heard of Ernest's coming down, looking very ill, and running across the rails at the greatest risk. By-the-way, that may have made Magdalen ill that day."

"No, not that. Did Beccles say more?"

"Well, no, he is cautious even for a doctor. There was not much in what he said, and you know I am the last person to care about gossip; but when Magdalen is concerned the thing becomes serious. I am greatly minded to have some talk to Dormer."

"Not just yet, I think, dear. I would not do it without Maggie's consent, and I am sure that she will not give it now. But let me go and see her."

As Mrs. Conway was on her way she was intercepted by the servant, Anne, who begged a minute's talk with her mistress.

"What is it, Anne?"

"I beg your pardon, m'm, and you never knew me take a liberty before."

"I have never had to complain of you, Anne, and I don't expect to have to do so now."

"I hope not, m'm; but I don't know how you may take it, and I hope you will believe that I mean the best."

"Yes, Anne, I will."

"Then, m'm, if I was Mrs. Dormer's mother, I would know what Miss Buxton said to her this day. It was something as ought not to have been said, and Mrs. Dormer suffers according, and I hope you'll excuse the liberty, m'm, but the girl that could live in this house and know Mrs. Dormer and love her and think of her own favor and standing when she could do good by speaking is not me and I don't deny it." And Anne, whose unpunctuated nonsense meant that the good-hearted creature was as nervous as possible at thus addressing a mistress who, though kind, was something despotic, made her escape as fast as she could, respectfully.

Mrs. Conway looked after her, not altogether displeased, for the girl's meaning was obviously kind. But her mistress believed that Anne could herself have furnished the information which she advised Mrs. Conway to obtain.

"Of course, she won't confess it, but she has been listening," said Mrs. Conway. "And that makes it the more necessary that I should know what she has heard."

What passed between parent and child at that interview it is not needful to relate. Enough to say that Magdalen, taken to her mother's heart, was induced little by little to tell all that she had learned. But the sobbing girl insisted on a reiterated promise that nothing should be said to her husband.

"But I can have no secret from your father, my darling," said Mrs. Conway, who was not weeping, but flushed with indignation.

"You must please say nothing angry about Ernest, mamma."

"That I can not promise," said her mother.

"But you must, dear. Perhaps I was wrong in telling you all."

"Wrong in trusting your mother?"

"But it was on her word that she would be kind enough to let me decide what should be done."

"And you shall, Magdalen. But I must say what I feel."

"If I do not, mamma, ought not you to be able to restrain yourself?" said Mrs. Dormer, gently. "There must be something which we do not understand, and until we do let us be patient. I will be your daughter when the time comes, if it ever comes, but in the mean time I am Ernest's wife."

"You are only too good, my darling," said Mrs. Conway.

Whether, in telling her story to Mr. Conway, Magdalen's mother fulfilled the implied promise not to be angry the reader will doubt.

"Is he not a bad man?" asked she, in conclusion. "Oh, if I had listened to you, William, and not urged the marriage! Why don't you speak?"

"You would have me express indignation, Mary?"

"Don't you feel it?"

"I did at first. But it is certain that we are hopelessly at sea, and that there is a mystery somewhere. We must submit to what seems very hard and cruel, Mary. Not because people would call it our duty—I know nothing about any kind of duty except that of defending one's self and those dear to one against the wild beasts called the world—but because we might make a fatal blunder if we attacked Ernest Dormer."

"I have given our pledge to Magdalen that we will do nothing without her leave. But that does not prevent my saying that we have cast her away on a man totally unworthy of her. This question that he had to ask her at the station—"

"Yes, what was that?" said Mr. Conway, eagerly.

"That she does not tell me. She says it is his secret, and without his permission she must not reveal it even to us. These secrets, indeed!" said Mrs. Conway, angrily, and walking up and down the room, rapidly. "We owe something to ourselves, William," she added, looking at him for encouragement. But he was silent.

"I can't make you out," said Mrs. Conway. "An hour ago you were all nerves and irritation because you had heard a few words from Edward Grafton which might mean nothing, so far as we knew. Now that something has come upon us which fairly stuns me you show no anger at all. You don't suppose that I will allow things to go on in this manner, and that I will not have Ernest Dormer summoned, if not by us, by his wife?"

"What is our one object, Mary?"

"Of course her happiness. But she is a young girl, married to a man who is much older than herself, and who has obtained a great influence over her. Is it to her, who has not a thought that is not his, that we are to leave the decision as to what is good for her? Are we not better judges of what should be done?"

"Perhaps not. If we were free to act, what would you desire?"

"Instantly to call Ernest Dormer here, and have a full explanation."

"He may refuse to come?"

"No, William, he is not a coward."

"Certainly not. But he may reply, generally, that he is engaged in an inquiry, and does not return to Naybury until it is finished."

"I will go to London and see him."

"And say what?"

"That he is making my child miserable, and endangering his own."

"That appeal to his feelings might give him a great deal of pain, and would assuredly give you much more; but if Ernest Dormer be the man we have believed him—that is, a man who acts on his own judgment and conviction—you would not bring him to Naybury until he chose to come."

"How can you take his part, William?"

"I am not doing it. But, Mary, let us be just. We thought that we were giving Magdalen to a gentleman. I hope that we have not been deceived. Some appearances are very much against him—against his kindness, to say no more. But there are not sufficient to justify our interfering between husband and wife."

"We have completely changed attitudes, William. You saw wrong in every thing he did before marriage, and the nearest approach to a quarrel we ever had, dear, was one day when you obstinately insisted that things which seemed to me proofs of affection were proofs of unworthiness. Do you remember?"

"Well. I said, when you had left me, which you did in anger, that I hoped I was a fool."

"I was the fool."

"We may find that it was not so."

"If I dared hope it. But, William, there is one thought crosses my mind. Magdalen is entirely in his hands, and believes all he says to her—believes in him when he says nothing to her. What if all this story about an inquiry should be mere falsehood, and that he wants an excuse for staying in London, and—"

"Finish, because the idea that he would proceed in that way merely that he might stay in London is out of the question. Magdalen has begged him to stay in London, and all she asks is a kind and frequent letter."

"We knew little of his habits before he married; but something which fell from his aunt, Mrs. Stepney—it was but half a sentence—struck on my mind, and I can not help recalling it. I imagined it to mean that she thought it a good thing that he should be out of the way of temptation."

"Remember, she is of the Bulliman sect, and that is part of their phraseology. It was a mere religious commonplace."

"You think so?"

"You, I see," said Mr. Conway, "are inclined to put a very bad meaning on it, and to suspect Ernest of that which would be accursed wickedness. I beg you, Mary, to banish such suspicion. We have no cause for it—none," he added, with unusual emphasis.

His wife was silent for some moments. Then she crossed the room to him, put her arms round his neck, and burst into tears.

"That we should be talking in this way about our darling—our one darling—within a year of her marriage! Oh, William!"

"My own Mary—my own true, brave wife," he answered, "it can not be that the unaltered love which we have lavished on her for twenty years will be repaid by the breaking of both our hearts. But I did not think that I should ever feel so bitterly against Ernest Dormer as I feel now that he has forced such tears from your eyes. May we live to forgive him that and all the rest! There is very good hope yet, dearest. Are you much afraid of the tongues of Naybury?"

"I?" asked Mary Conway, looking up with a smile through her tears. "If that were all! But I wish I could share your hopefulness. We have changed characters, I tell you, William. I have never before had to wish that."

"It is well that in the heaviest trial of our life, Mary, I can see reasons for hope, and I can say something to strengthen you, who have been cheering and strengthening me for years and years. You must not believe that I am speaking words of comfort which do not come from my heart. I have been very miserable for many days, and I was very miserable this morning. But what you have told me has forced me to think closely, and I speak honestly, and I will say solemnly, when I tell you my belief that Magdalen will yet be happy, and that we shall be happy with her. Come, I predicted trouble, and it came—let me predict good, and do you hope that I shall be as right."

"I will hope it, but sorrow is so much more certain than happiness," said Mrs. Conway, wiping her eyes.

"That, also, you never said to me before, and, thanks to you, our lives have been a contradiction to it. But there will be a great spell of happiness due to us to compensate for this bad time, Mary. A word, though I dare say that it will occur to you. I would take care that Magdalen has no visitors except safe ones. This little girl meant well, and of course spoke kindly, but there are some people in Naybury who may call with very different intentions. Let one of us sit with her up stairs, and the other be sentinel here. We will have no Dorcas coming to give a stab and pretend that it is sympathy."

"Yes, that is right. But what a state of things, William!"

"Pooh! we have taken it by turns to watch over our baby in other days. It is but watching her a little longer, bless her!" said Mr. Conway. "And if Mrs. Bulliman calls I will fire upon her with Voltaire until she runs out of the house stopping her ears."

"She is not the worst of her set," said Mrs. Conway; "but we will keep them all out. How long this is to last Heaven knows."

"A night may be long, dear, but dawn comes sooner or later."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE PRICE.

Probably, but for the existence of Mr. Haslop, Sergeant Penguin would not have given himself any great amount of trouble in regard to Ernest Dormer's business. Having made up his mind, as we have seen that the learned man had done, that there was no murder in the matter, and that a knot of low persons were engaged in a not very hopeful attempt at extortion, the Sergeant saw nothing in the affair worthy of his intervention. He had been acquainted with such noble extortions in the course of his business that this attempt had nothing in it to interest him. He had known a case in which a brother, on the strength of the contents of a letter which he had actually destroyed, lived in comfort and virtue for years on the income secretly supplied by a married sister. He knew a case in which a father lived pleasantly on the terrors of a son. He knew a case in which a wife, separated by reason of her own misconduct, doubled the allowance which had been settled upon her, by the judicious use of extracts from the letter-books of her husband, a solicitor—books to which her successful admirer had access in the days preceding her elopement. What was such an affair as this to Sergeant Penguin? He had no particular liking for Ernest Dormer; and, as the latter had said, would have hanged him as readily as any body else, had that duty come in the way of business. But inasmuch as Mr. Haslop was so keenly interested in the matter, Penguin resolved to do his best for Dormer. It was not that the Sergeant owed Haslop a good turn. Penguin, like most other men, was quite capable of masterly ingratitude when the situation called for it; but he had a strong desire to stand well with Haslop, a man whom the Sergeant felt to be every way his superior, and under whose con-

tempt for certain vulgar forensic arts Penguin—not altogether a vulgar man—had occasionally winced. He wished Haslop to think him something better than the advocate whose terrific religious warnings appalled juries; or whose profusely lachrymose appeals drowned out their common-sense. He wanted Haslop to think of him as a fine-hearted fellow, condemned to unwelcome work, and doing it, like an earnest worker, as well as he could. He was not a fine-hearted fellow, though a good-natured one, and the work was not entirely unwelcome, considering that he hated all work, and he did not do it as well as he could—a fact known to attorneys and clients, who nevertheless were glad to bear with the slovenly way in which he got up his cases for the sake of the effective oratory with which he won his verdicts.

"Horsham," said Sergeant Penguin to his clerk, "do you happen to know a man called Dudley, an apothecary, in Lancaster Street?"

"Yes, I know him," said Mr. Horsham. It was the right thing to say, first, because it was true; and secondly, because Horsham was aware that his master knew that.

"Just see him quietly, and ask him to look round here this afternoon."

"Say you are not well?" asked Mr. Horsham.

"What the devil do I care what you say?" demanded his master. "He will come if he knows I want him."

The Sergeant was right, and in a couple of hours Mr. Benjamin Dudley was shown into the inner room. The contrast between the Sergeant's chambers and those of Mr. Haslop was as marked as that between Mr. Dudley's dingy shop and the establishment of Mr. Chervil. Penguin always said that he was looking out for another place, and this formula, much in use with many men, saves a world of cleanliness and trouble. Some folks use it in a theological sense, and then it accounts for several things which otherwise we might not altogether like.

"How do you do, Mr. Dudley? Pray sit down," said the Sergeant, losing no time in inspecting his visitor, and observing that he was dressed respectably and professionally, "which was not so before," quoted the lawyer to himself. "Excuse my having asked you to call; you will infer that I should not have done so without a reason."

"The honor of an interview with Mr. Sergeant Penguin—" said Mr. Dudley, carelessly, and not even completing his sentence.

"Just so," said the Sergeant, smiling. "How much do you want out of Mr. Ernest Dormer?" he added, with a stern look and a harsh voice.

But Mr. Dudley was not startled, though the Sergeant had opened upon him sooner than he expected. The former had his own reasons for suspecting that this was going to be the subject of their interview, for he had managed to learn that Mr. Dormer and the Sergeant had met; and the business itself being the one thing on Dudley's mind, the suggestion naturally arose that Dormer had taken counsel of Penguin. So that Dudley was prepared for the shock.

"Who asks the question?" said Mr. Dudley, coolly.

"I ask it," replied the Sergeant.

"I hear that," said Mr. Dudley, "and I hear it asked in a way which is calculated to bring a civil answer."

"Civil or savage, man, I don't care a straw!" said Penguin, with a rude laugh. "Give me an answer, and give it in any way that suits you."

"How much are you ordered to give, then? That's my answer."

"Ha!" said the Sergeant, not in the least enraged, but putting up the gold eye-glass. "The effrontery of that reply convinces me that you have no case, as I have all along believed. If you had had any ground to stand on you would have been polite. I need not detain you longer, Mr. Dudley. Horsham!"

"Sir," said the clerk, entering.

"I don't know what Mr. Dudley charges for a visit, but settle with him, and give me the brief in that swindling case."

Without looking again at Dudley the Sergeant dipped his pen, and applied himself to his papers.

But Mr. Dudley did not rise from his chair, and as Mr. Horsham lingered, said,

"Consultation for consultation. I should like to ask you a question, Mr. Sergeant."

Penguin rather liked this insolence, and replied, laying down his pen, "Ask away."

The clerk withdrew, at a look, but, according to custom, did not go very far beyond the torn baize of the door.

"Some days have passed since I had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Dormer," said Dudley.

"A good many days will pass before you have the pleasure of seeing him again, if he takes my advice, and if you do."

"Nobody can give better than Sergeant Penguin when he knows the facts. I wished to ask whether you do know them."

"I know that there are none, except the fact that there is a plot to get money out of a respectable family by means of a preposterous lie. I am willing to suppose that you are only the tool in the matter, and therefore, for old acquaintance' sake—I know no better reason—I tell you that you had better not let it be made a police case."

"We have no desire to make it one," said Dudley, undauntedly; "but you know as well as any body how to prevent that."

Sergeant Penguin was actually pleased at the assurance which had thus perverted his menace into a deprecation of hostility.

"You brazen it out well, Mr. Dudley," he said; "but you are a man of business, and I am another, and I have known something of you for a good while."

"You know nothing, Sir, which might not be published in the papers."

"No, perhaps not," said Sergeant Penguin, laughing. "The papers publish odd things,

very odd things, Mr. Dudley. But you may as well take it from me that this last venture of yours is not going to be lucky, and you had better give it up before worse than bad luck comes of it."

"If I had asked your advice, Sergeant Penguin, I should have followed it implicitly. But I should not have left you in the dark. As it is, I see that you know nothing but what Mr. Dormer has told you, and therefore you must excuse my saying that your advice is not worth the straw you mentioned a little while ago."

"Well, if you believe you've got hold of any thing worth having, why the devil don't you answer the first question I put to you. How much do you want?"

"Tell your clerk to go away from that door. A man who snores like that should never listen at doors. He is gone now," said Dudley, "at least for the moment, and I want five thousand pounds."

"Most people do," said the Sergeant. "But why not ask double?"

"Because I do not think that it could be paid."

"Oh yes," said Penguin, in a jeering way. "We roll in wealth. Nothing could be too high for us. Our good name is such a very precious jewel. Make it twenty thousand while you are about it. You are as likely to get that as the smaller sum."

"I have heard that you have got verdicts when you have known next to nothing of your cases, Sergeant, but it will not be so now. If you are to be the go-between in the matter you will pay me the amount I have mentioned."

"And suppose that Mr. Dormer should prefer to submit the matter to arbitration?" said Penguin, confidentially.

"I am glad he is so reasonable," said Dudley; "but this is not a case for two opinions. I have mentioned the terms, and must abide by them."

"Still I think that if you referred them to an arbitrator against whom you could say nothing, and who would certainly endeavor to do justice, we might make a modified arrangement."

"May I ask whom you mean?" said Dudley, deceived.

"The nearest sitting magistrate," replied Penguin. "My advice to Mr. Dormer is that he sends you before a jury for attempt at extortion of money."

"It would be very good advice, I tell you, Sir, but that you do not know what I should say. Nor is it my intention to tell you. But I fancy that you know enough of me to suppose that when I take up a business like this I see my way to the end of it, and also that I have brains enough not to show my whole hand at once."

"My good fellow, I have heard these words so often, and I have convicted so many estimable persons who have used them," said the Sergeant, plaintively.

"Very likely, because they are common-sense words, and it doesn't follow that because some folks lied when they used them others may not speak the truth. Our case is the last. We mean to have the money."

"We?"

"Well, I used your professional language, Sir."

"Not badly backed out. I said that there was a conspiracy. But fair play. I did not ask you here that I might trap you, and any thing said here is confidential."

"I want no favors, Sergeant Penguin. I asked you to send away your clerk from the door merely because the figures in an arrangement are things most persons like to keep to themselves. All I have said you may tell to your client, and it would be well you did."

"How long will you give him to find the money."

"We are in no hurry," said Mr. Dudley. "We have no desire to leave the country, and our witnesses are not likely to be out of the way."

"You might have been something better than an apothecary, Mr. Dudley, if you had chosen," said Sergeant Penguin, pleased again at the way in which his insidious question had been met.

"I intend to be something better, Sergeant Penguin, and you will have the pleasure of assisting me to that elevation."

"There is one elevation I should like to assist you to," thought the Sergeant, "but I fear there is no chance of that. Well, Mr. Dudley, if the consultation you requested has satisfied you, I suppose you will allow me to say good-morning."

"It has not been without fruit, Sir. You know my terms, and you now believe that I have a good chance of enforcing them. I don't ask what you are going to say to your client, but if I might advise, it would be that you tell him that you know nothing of the circumstances."

"Come here, Dudley," said the Sergeant, leading him to the window, which was out of all ear-shot. The lawyer knelt with one knee on the dusty old window-seat, and looked up into Dudley's face.

"Fair play," said Penguin, in a low voice. "The world's the world, and if a man really gets hold of a piece of luck I don't see why he should be robbed of it. I don't care whether you get this money or do not. But you are going the wrong way to work, even if you have any case. What's the good of a preposterous lie about a murder?" he said, pressing up to Dudley in the most friendly manner. "What's the good of trying it on with penny romance? Murder be damned! You make me laugh. But if you have a probable story, tell it properly, and you may do some good for yourself. I fancy I know where there may be a spark or two; but don't come on us with red fire and a conflagration."

"There was a murder, and I want it," said Dudley, in the same tone.

"Do you want *me* to believe it?"

"Not in the least. It will be quite enough for Mr. Dormer to believe it, and to ask Mrs. Dormer about it. I not only believe it, but know it. You can do just as you please. You will have to pay me that money."

"When those rooks turn white," said the Sergeant, pointing to a noisy colony in the tree-tops. "Good-morning."

"Let us see," said the Sergeant, sitting down in the window-seat as his visitor retired. "Let us see, and let us mark. The fellow sticks to his text, as I expected. He asks a good sum, which I also expected—if a secret's worth any thing, it's worth a great deal. He ought not to have held on to the murder with me; that was a blunder, but I think he took my hint. I shall hear of him again, with modified representations. I have no doubt in the world that he has a pretty little story about my lady, and if he would work that he might take his money and be off. No doubt there is a tale there which she would not like to have told. But to mix up the death of Andrew Barton with my lady's levities is worthy only of a drug-compeller accustomed to brew hell-broths. If they were not all on the high ropes the thing might be settled quietly enough; but Haslop believes her an angel, and Dormer won't let her know what is said, and between these two high-flyers there's danger of the scandal being proved. If she's a woman like most, how enraged she would be at their sham delicacy when there is really a bit of business to be done! I wish I could see her. I should have instructions in five minutes to settle the affair. But between two good men who are afraid to move, and one scoundrel who wants us to believe an impossible lie, Mrs. Dormer will come to grief. I had better see Haslop, however, and report progress."

"I have something to tell you, Haslop, about that matter," he said, as the conveyancer pointed to a chair in the delightful room looking on the garden. "This chamber," he added, "reminds me of the line,

'A place where it was always afternoon.'"

"Dormer?" said Haslop, eagerly.

"Yes."

"It can't be good news; but I hope it is not very bad," said Haslop.

"I hardly know what to call it, but it will be more practical to tell you what it is. First, however, have you done any thing?"

"Nothing worth telling."

"I do not know that I have done much more. But I have ascertained that the other side stick to their story, and want five thousand pounds. The story, as they tell it, is a lie, and the question is, whether we shall pay or defy them."

"I made you understand, I think, that the question as between us and them is the smallest in my eyes. I hope I did not fail to make you understand that the happiness of Magdalen Dormer is the only thing that I care about."

"That fact I grasped. But the one question is too much involved in the other for distinct treatment. I have seen the man who, if he is not the sole agent in the matter, is the master mind, and I have had it out with him. I have told him that his murder romance will not hold water. I have not told him, but I have left him to infer, that if he can present any more probable tale somebody may consider how far it is worth attention."

"I saw from the first what you thought, Penguin, and I perceive that you continue to run in the same groove."

"We may as well speak plainly, having one object in view. There was no murder, but a lady may have—gone wrong."

"A lady did not go wrong, and I am not clear that there was no murder."

"Then, Haslop, I have no objection to set aside my own belief, and act on yours. I do not think I could better prove my willingness to serve the person so dear to you. I will see what can be made of that view of the case. But distinctly understand me. I don't believe either in the murder, or—pardon me—in the lady. But I will act as if I did both. I fear that it will come to a case of hush-money."

"I see a different end. But I accept your assistance on her behalf, if, as his friend, you are free to give it."

"He authorizes me to consider their interests one."

"And you said you had no good news," said Mr. Haslop, radiantly.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE ACT OF ACCUSATION.

Sergeant Penguin lost no time. On the following evening he and Mr. Haslop met Ernest Dormer at the hotel in Covent Garden. Penguin had intended to see Haslop alone, at his own place, but a peremptory note from Dormer, apprising the advocate that there must be no more delay, brought them all together, Haslop being as eager as Penguin that Ernest Dormer should do nothing more that could precipitate exposure until the council should have decided on the one great question before it. So there they met, Mr. Haslop's sole interest being in the happiness of Magdalen, Sergeant Penguin, perhaps a little for the sake of professional fair play, rather inclined to watch over the interests of Dormer, and Ernest himself proud and silent, but mentally availing himself of every point that seemed to aid in saving the fame of Magdalen. He had vowed to behave to her as a gentleman, whether he could love her or not, and he strove hard to keep his vow in spirit as well as in letter.

"Sergeant Penguin had thought that he and I had better have spoken alone, Dormer, because we should then have been able to examine the case finally, sparing you some preliminary detail, and presenting you with results; but he tells me that you desire to be present, and of

course you have the best right to decide how that shall be."

"I thank you—thank you both. You will not find me impatient. I have too much at stake to be impatient."

"Then to business," said Penguin. "I told you, Haslop, and I wrote you, Dormer, that I saw Dudley yesterday, and that I expressed for his story a contempt which I felt."

"And feel?" asked Dormer, nervously.

"Not to the same extent," said Penguin, looking at Haslop, to remind him that the Sergeant was fulfilling his last promise.

"We will hear without interrupting you," said Mr. Haslop.

"After seeing you, Mr. Haslop, and feeling convinced by your argument that there was more in the darker side of the story than I had believed, I sent to this Dudley to say that he must come to me with whatever evidence he might have, or that we should take an initiative that he would not like. He has known me long enough to be aware that this was no professional threat, still less a *brutum fulmen*, and he made an appointment for this afternoon. He kept it, and brought his evidence. I was perfectly frank with him, and explained without reticence that he was a rascal, and that our decision would be guided by motives entirely apart from any belief in what he asserted, and simply upon the probabilities of his being able to concoct a tale that might be worth suppressing, but that I did not much believe that we should take that course. He seemed prepared to be thus treated, and handed me two papers, which, he said, embodied all that he should at present allege."

"You have them?" asked Dormer.

"Yes. He had no reason to hesitate to leave them with me, you know. They are not exactly affidavits, but are drawn up in a sort of form, and are in a legal handwriting, which is easily explained. Now, shall I read them, or shall Haslop glance over them and tell you his impression? I ought to say that they are necessarily in language too explicit not to be painful."

"Please to read," said Ernest Dormer. But he changed his seat, and got outside the rays of the lamp.

"The first," said Sergeant Penguin, "is the statement of George Farquhar, who describes himself as an articled clerk to a solicitor's firm in our Inn. I know something of them, and whatever their clerk may be, they are very respectable. He says that he knows the lady who was Miss Magdalen Conway, and is now Mrs. Ernest Dormer. That he knew her from having been introduced to her at the house of Mr. Justice Trailbaston, and that her personal appearance made so strong an impression upon him that he could not forget her, nor could he mistake her for another. That he had frequently seen her visit the chambers of one Percy Vaughan, in the Inn, which chambers were nearly opposite to those of his employers. That having occasion to search for a paper in an upper front-room in the house (a room also in the occupancy of his employers), on the 6th August, 186–, about two in the afternoon, he saw the lady, whether she were then Miss Conway or Mrs. Dormer he does not know, at one of the windows of Mr. Vaughan's rooms, and that she wore a white lace scarf. That she saw him looking across at her and retired, but that a few minutes afterward he saw a gentleman, whom he knew to be Mr. Vaughan, approach her, place his arm round her, which the white lace scarf well enabled him to see, and kiss her several times. That he saw a workman, whose name he afterward heard was Barton, approach the window, along the parapet, and stoop, and the next moment he saw Barton fall backward, the hand of Vaughan being at the moment extended in the act of pushing him over. That he joined the crowd that assembled round the fallen man, and saw him removed, under the care of Mr. Dudley the surgeon. That he had not felt it his duty to state what he had seen, as he believed that it would come out by other means, and had a great reluctance to appear in a matter where that lady was concerned, as he had been much charmed by her grace and beauty, but that he had on the same day confided these details to Mr. Dudley, who had made a note of them. That he made this statement at the desire of Mr. Dudley, whom he had known as an intimate friend for many years, and who required corroboration of his own account of the last moments of Andrew Barton. That he has nothing to gain or lose by this statement, and that his father is a wealthy tradesman at York, who is about to purchase a business for him as soon as he shall have passed his examination."

"What is this person's address?" said Ernest Dormer, in a cold voice.

"I will write them down for you directly," said Penguin. "I want Haslop to hear the second paper while the first is in his recollection. This second is, of course, the statement of Benjamin Dudley, of Lancaster Street, surgeon. He says that on the 6th of August, the date mentioned in Farquhar's paper, he was called into the Inn to see a man who had just fallen. That, by-the-way, is true, for I saw and spoke to Dudley, quite well understanding his then reason for carrying away the dead body of a common tiler. I had no doubt how Barton came by his death. But I will read on. That the man was taken to his, Dudley's surgery, and that, though mortally injured, he was conscious. That the dying man declared that he had seen a locket lying in the leaden gutter before the window, and had stooped to pick it up, intending to get a trifle by taking it to the steward. That as he stooped he saw a man kissing a lady in white, and that the man instantly rushed at him, and pushed him over to his death. That Barton expired in a few minutes, and that he, Dudley, took from his hand a locket, which he had kept carefully sealed up, and had lately given to Mr. Ernest Dormer, who had taken it away. That he had kept the secret, intending

to make use of it for his own advantage, he being in low circumstances, but no opportunity had arisen, Mr. Vaughan having left England, and Miss Conway having gone into the country, he had not known where. The rest of his case he had verbally submitted to Mr. Sergeant Penguin, and desired to be spared the painful necessity of enforcing his demand, which, however, he should do unless Mr. Dormer's legal advisers shaped out an arrangement. In this case he would go to Australia, and never return to England."

"Now, Haslop," said Sergeant Penguin, "what are the stories of those two scoundrels worth? Five thousand pounds?"

"Not five thousand farthings, as they stand," said Haslop.

"No," said Penguin; "but unhappily Farquhar is corroborated by another witness, whom I need not name, but who is worth all the evidence in the world."

"There is no place for delicacy now," said Ernest Dormer. "You mean my wife's admission?"

"That is the difficulty," said Mr. Sergeant Penguin. "The difficulty, I mean, so far as you are concerned."

"I do not understand some distinction you are drawing," said Dormer.

"Mr. Haslop does, I doubt not."

"I see your meaning. It is, of course, a professional suggestion, for which you should be thanked, professionally."

"I do not see," said Dormer, emphatically.

"You will not fly at the plain English, Dormer?" said Penguin.

"Speak plainer, for God's sake."

"If Mrs. Dormer is prepared to swear, and you to believe her, that the chamber story is a lie, and that she was never at Percy Vaughan's—and if a man may do any thing for life, a woman may for fame—well—it is too late to-night, but I will have Farquhar and Dudley in the police-dock by eleven in the morning," said Penguin, "and I stake my reputation on getting them sent for trial."

"It is right you should say this," said Dormer, quietly, "though I told you in this very room that my wife had admitted the visit on the date mentioned."

"Mr. Haslop has told you that I am right in saying it."

"Yes," said Haslop. "But you might as well ask Mrs. Dormer to confess that she committed the murder as to deny that she was in the chambers."

"I thank you for my wife, Haslop," said Ernest Dormer, with dignity.

"And I have done my duty," said the Sergeant. "At the risk of doing more, and receiving the usual thanks of the overzealous, I will simply say that I believe I can crush these men without going into court, and that if I am able to tell them that Mrs. Dormer denies the charge, and that we prosecute for conspiracy for the purpose of extortion, I shall have them on their knees. I know something against Mr. Dudley. Give me authority to say this, without troubling Mrs. Dormer in the matter. I am glad we have that locket, Haslop."

"If your offer is accepted, the locket is worth having," said Haslop.

"Six months hence, of course, Mr. Dormer may travel—but I need not point out the future."

"Not that future," said Ernest Dormer. "Sergeant Penguin, you have shown yourself a more resolute friend than I had a right to expect you to be, remembering that my confidence in you was an accident. I thank you once more. But my wife will not lie, nor will I lie in her name. Haslop understands her—and perhaps me."

"I like you better than I ever thought to do, Mr. Dormer," said Haslop, simply.

"Having said my say, and being assured that I have not wounded your feelings by a well-meant suggestion," said Penguin, "I may as well withdraw from a business in which I can be of no use."

"On the contrary," said Mr. Haslop, "stand by us. You appreciate the motives which prevent our taking one course, and you may probably be able to point out another."

"I am nothing, if not practical," said Sergeant Penguin. "I venture no remark upon the attitude which Mr. Dormer chooses to adopt in regard to—to an individual who—who may be thought to owe him some little elucidation."

"Why I don't demand the truth from my wife?" said Ernest.

"That is my meaning, no doubt. But I say that I make no remark on that avoidance of what most persons might think the obvious course. I recognize the existence of certain feelings which—which I might not have under similar circumstances, and it is not necessary to enter upon that discussion."

He was talking for time; but suddenly he changed his hesitating manner.

"I'll tell you what. I'll have a shy at Mr. Farquhar."

"He is clearly a tool," said Haslop.

"Yes, and a dirty one; but something may be done with him if I can get at him. Dudley has no other evidence. He says he has, but that's nothing; and the probabilities are that the affair has been concocted by these two only. If I can detach one, down goes the other."

"Do you expect to get Farquhar to retract what he has written here?"

"Listen. He says that he is an articled clerk, about to pass an examination. The attorneys are not exactly a regiment of angels; but if that document, coupled with Dudley's demand, were laid before the Law Society, our young friend would have about as much chance of admission as Dudley has of being made court physician."

"I do not see that Mr. Dormer should object to Farquhar's being sifted," said Haslop.

"I do not object," said Ernest Dormer. "But the result can not affect me. I am willing to hear all that friends can say, and to let them

exhaust their skill in endeavoring to do that which can not be done. I am thankful to them. I must not be thought unthankful because I stand aloof, or because I am about to act for myself."

"Let me point out to you," said Sergeant Penguin, "that while there is a question of the credibility of witnesses, you will certainly act unwisely, and will probably act unjustly, in doing any thing at all. Imagine Farquhar retracting every word in that statement."

"Would that bring me nearer home?" said Ernest Dormer. He spoke the words with a sadness which had not previously been in his voice, and which touched even Penguin. Haslop's lip quivered.

"I have unhappily been compelled to see a good deal of the misery which arises from conjugal—from the errors of married persons," said Sergeant Penguin, "and few things are more distressing to an adviser. In ordinary crime the persons are usually of the lower class, and it is merely a question of revenge on one side and of escape on the other. But where delicate feelings are wounded an advocate's task is painful. I do not want to preach, and the heart knoweth its own bitterness. I may just say—the hint will be unwelcome now, but may be recalled hereafter—that this case which is now troubling us is one in which very much scope is afforded for forgiveness and forgetfulness. If we were to suppose that all we have heard is true—whereas it is manifest that 'some truth there is, but dashed and brewed with lies'—we should have to consider extreme youth and inexperience, and a subsequent course of perfect—I believe, absolutely perfect conduct. We should have to recall our own life and habits, and ask ourselves whether, up to within a short time of marriage, and long after we were engaged, our arrangements had been those of a kind which we could defend. We should not only look at all this, but we should remember a couple of aged parents, who would be sent heart-broken to the grave if we acted with stern justice, as it is called, though it is not the justice which we hope for elsewhere. And in a worldly point of view, we might consider that it is not for a man's interests to be labeled with disgrace, while mercy to an innocent child—I would not trespass on holy ground, but something has reached me—mercy might not plead in vain for an innocent baby. I earnestly beg pardon for what I have said."

He was out of the room before either of his companions could reply. The Sergeant had made his speech in an earnest and fearless manner, but in a voice which he kept so low that it was only just audible. He spoke with a certain sincerity, that is to say, he was sincere in wishing to prevent a separation, and in letting Haslop see that he did his best to prevent it. That he should understand the nature of the man he addressed was out of the question; but he made his points with kindness and feeling, and they were pretty much what might properly have been said in the average number of cases of conjugal trouble.

As the door closed upon him Haslop and Dormer exchanged glances, and that was enough. Neither felt that the other needed a word of comment on the Sergeant's appeal. But Haslop put his hand into Dormer's for a moment, and then said,

"There is a way out of this labyrinth. Be patient."

"Haslop, I did not know how brave I could be. Do you understand?"

"Yes. But you are something which is better than brave. You are merciful, as you think. Your reward will be in finding that you are only just."

"He said 'travel.'"

"You must stay."

"I never thought of doing otherwise. I was going to say something else. I thought that I did not love her. I know not whether that is so. But to have this thing blotted out forever, and to save her name and her child's, I *would* travel, Haslop, and only you in all the world should know that the fatal slip on the glacier was not accident. I have been planning my route, down to the foolishest detail. I should arrange with Mangles to print my letters from abroad, and with a publisher for the reprint on my return. I should post, with my own hand, overnight, a letter desiring money to be sent me in a week. I should leave orders at the hotel for some special dish, and call attention to my words by making a storm with the waiter, and I should take the best guides to be got for money. They should return without me, though. While I have been sitting here I have been mapping all that out—while knowing that I had no such intention—for it could not save her—and hers."

"I will forget, if I can," said Haslop, "that you have meditated a crime compared to which any thing that has been spoken of to-night in this room is venial. I am one of the people called Christians, Ernest Dormer."

"Is it unchristian to give your life for those you love?"

"It is unchristian to do evil that good may come. But you are not about to do evil; forget that you have talked of it. You have a brave man's work to do, and you will stay and do it. Let me help you where I may."

CHAPTER XLVII.

A DRIVE.

"I SEE their game," said Mr. Dudley, as he reached home.

He strode through the shop, which, since Mr. Spitty's flight, had been intrusted to an unpaid assistant—a young gentleman who, having been engaged as doctor to an emigrant ship, thought it might be as well to learn the names of a few medicines—and going into the back parlor, angrily threw off his respectable frock-coat, and

struggled fiercely through the holes of a torn old dressing-gown. He then lit a hideous short pipe, and sat down for a little reflection.

"Yes, Mr. Sergeant Penguin. First you'd have me cut all the back-bone out, and then you'd have me come and ask you whether the story does not look better so. Thank you, Mr. Sergeant Penguin, but I give too much advice gratis myself not to know about what it is worth. Come in!"

This was to the unpaid assistant, a red-haired young man, with spectacles. He had a large shop-bottle, with a gold label, in his hand.

"Sorry to bore you, but there's a woman who says that she has got tic. What's good for tic?"

"Nothing."

"So I fancied I had heard; but I was going to give her some of this, only I thought I'd ask you."

"Oh! this would cure her directly, bless you! but you see the coroner might make coarse observations at the inquest. Take a note not to give that to emigrants unless you or the captain want to see them go over the side. Give her an ounce of that," said Mr. Dudley, crossing to the door, and indicating a drawer. "It will do her no particular harm."

Closing the door on the emigrants' doctor Mr. Dudley resumed his cogitations.

"It has all gone well so far, except for the hitch caused by that weak idiot. But that turned out for the best. He could not have stood Dormer. And his writing out the story. That he was afraid of, but then he was more afraid of having to tell it. I think I made the tales cohere nobly. If I had only dared to trust that cursed old hag there shouldn't have been a flaw in the indictment, but it was not to be thought of. She would have sold me as safe as houses, or she would have wanted so much that the game would not have been worth playing. Farquhar is a fool, but he's cheaper, and he's safe. But there's more work to do. The iron's hot now. Strike, Mr. Dudley, strike!" Which thing Mr. Dudley did. And he struck hard. But before we note the effect of his blow another thing must be told.

Sergeant Penguin was early at his chambers next day, to the rage of his laundress, who, after the manner of her class, considered herself personally wronged if her employer took the liberty of altering the hour of arriving at his own chambers. "Real gentlemen never did those things," was her remark to an assenting friend, whose ideal of realism, in this respect, was an elderly young gentleman, who lived in his rooms, never rose till twelve, and then went to his club to breakfast, returning more or less sober in the hours which it used to be considered clever to call small, and who never checked her red account-book, less, however, from absolute faith in her, than from a want of acquaintance with rudimentary arithmetic. But the Sergeant was unconscious of the offense he had given, and this was lucky for the injured person, for Penguin was not of a disposition to encourage liberties in his inferiors, except politically. He was as unreasonably angry because Mr. Horsham had not arrived half an hour before his time, and wasted sundry imprecations on clerks who could not sleep near their business, but must live at Stoke Newington.

"Devil stoke Stoke Newington," said Sergeant Penguin. "I never lived at Stoke Newington when I was a young man. Islington was good enough for me. He'll be living at Stoke Poges next, I suppose."

But the word reminded him of Gray's Elegy, and he soon began to quote it, and quoting at any length will restore any body to good temper. The youth's head had not begun to rest upon the lap of earth when Mr. Horsham arrived—and was received affably.

"Good-morning, Horsham. The early bird catches the worm. There's a worm I want you to catch for me."

And he dismissed him, with instructions.

"Well?" when Mr. Horsham returned in a reasonably short space of time.

"I judged that you wanted to see him."

"And you judged rightly, Horsham," said his master, pleasantly.

"There's his address, in Judd Street. I had no end of a bother to get it, as I expected, but luckily the managing Chancery knew me. It is not convenient to Mr. Farquhar to be seen by every body."

"But why is not he at his masters' offices?"

"He has been ill for ever so long, and his doctor sent him to a farm-house for change of air."

"Farmer lives near Chancery Lane—locks up his cattle carefully, eh? Is that what you mean?"

"I think he has been out of the way, but not so," said Mr. Horsham. "I had a little talk, on the quiet, with the man I speak of, and as he knew it was all right with me, he let out that Mr. F. was a loose fish, and was away under a sort of cloud. Quite out of the firm's good books long ago."

"Yes, that's about the character I expected to hear. And he's ill, you say, at this house in Judd Street, and that means that he will not be seen."

"He'd see me," said Mr. Horsham. "I got the pass."

"He'll see me, I fancy," said the Sergeant, with a slight loftiness. "By Jove!" he added, looking out at the window, "that's just it. There's Mr. Sangar getting out there. Run across the square, Horsham, will you, and ask him, with my compliments, to lend me his carriage for an hour or so if he can."

Mr. Horsham knew the dignity of his place too well to run, but he stopped the coachman, and delivered his message, and in five minutes more Sergeant Penguin was on his way to Judd Street. He was pleased at having the carriage, and the coachman was pleased also, because he knew that his mistress particularly wanted it early, and he had a grievance against his mistress for refusing to allow him to keep two pigs which had been given to him.

"Take up my card. I know he's up, for I saw him at the window."

The learned Sergeant's manner bore down all opposition, and the dirty servant whom Dudley, unjust to a cleanly tribe of quadrupeds, had called cat, scarcely managed to present the card (with an embellishment representing her thumb) to Mr. Farquhar, when Sergeant Penguin rolled in after it.

Mr. Farquhar was up, though the Sergeant had not seen him, and was dressed, and was reading and making notes from his books.

"Sergeant Penguin," said Farquhar, coloring highly.

"Yes, Mr. Farquhar," said the Sergeant, in his cheery manner. "You've forgotten me, I see; but we have met in society, and on that fact I ventured to presume to intrude. I am glad to see you hard at law-reading—work's the only way to get on in these pushing days, but I know you are one of the hard workers. I will not disturb you very long."

Disturb. Mr. Farquhar was delighted, sincerely delighted. Sergeant Penguin, a great man, had come to call on him, and had come in his own open carriage with two big horses. The visit acted like a tonic, and Mr. Farquhar was politeness itself.

"You were not going out, perhaps," said the Sergeant, "or I could have set you down, and we could talk as we went along?"

"I had not been going out, certainly," said Mr. Farquhar, "for I have leave of absence to work for the examination. But your time is precious, and—"

And, he did not add, I fancy I see myself losing the chance of driving about with Sergeant Penguin.

"Well, the fact is that I *am* busy, but I work a good deal while going about. Motion helps thought—*solvitur ambulando*, and all that, and if you don't mind—"

"I will just put on my coat, and be down in a moment."

"All right, don't hurry," said the Sergeant, who thereupon descended the stairs, and went out.

"No particular haste to get back, my friend, is there?" said the Sergeant. "You could drive me round Hampstead way for an hour or so, couldn't you?"

"Do the horses all the good in the world, Sir," said the vengeful coachman. "They don't get no work to speak of."

He had spoken of it though with some emphasis when he got to the stable at three o'clock that morning, after a party.

"Then just make a round, and get me back to the Inn by twelve o'clock."

"Calling here, Sir?"

"No," said the Sergeant, with a slight grimace, "I don't think that will be exactly necessary. Now, Mr. Farquhar. Nay, nay, get in. Is the air too much for you, as you've been an invalid—shall we have the head up?"

"Not at all, thank you," said Mr. Farquhar; "I enjoy it."

And he did begin to enjoy it, and he was glad that the carriage went past two or three shops where he was known—and trusted; and he was glad to be seen with Sergeant Penguin; and he almost felt a little respectable; and he offered a few remarks, feeble enough, no doubt, but they showed that he was pleased. But the Sergeant had said that they had met in society. Where was that? He did not like to ask; it would not do to forget where he had seen Mr. Sergeant Penguin.

The coachman, for his own reasons, eschewed the direct road, and took them along the east side of the Regent's Park.

"Come to the Gardens on Sunday much, Mr. Farquhar?" said the Sergeant, indicating the direction of the famous Sabbatarian flirting grounds.

"Not very often," said Mr. Farquhar.

Which was true. He had been once, however, but did not care much about it. He was not wise enough to enjoy the scene from a sarcastic point of view, nor idiotic enough to enjoy it for its own sake.

"Great place for you young swells, though. By-the-way, the Trailbastons go there a good deal."

"The Trailbastons!" said Farquhar, coloring very much.

"Yes, the judge's family. It must have been at their house that we met, I fancy. You are very intimate there, I think. And they are charming girls."

"I have not seen them for a long time," said Farquhar, uneasily.

"No? You were a great favorite there, I know. They introduced you to all their best people. Wasn't it there that you met that beautiful Miss Conway, now Mrs. Dormer?" asked the Sergeant, turning round, and looking Farquhar full in the face. "Ah, you need not blush; she was quite handsome enough to turn any young fellow's head."

A great poet has drawn, with a few words, a most pathetic picture of the poor trapped creature that sees the hunter coming up the path. But here was a poor creature trapped, and the hunter close beside him, preparing to torture him.

"Yes, very handsome," said Farquhar, alternately hot and cold, and considering on what pretense he could beg the Sergeant to let him go.

"I know you think that," said the Sergeant, "because I saw the statement yesterday in your own handwriting."

"Yes?" asked Farquhar, very feebly.

"Yes," replied Penguin. "Don't hurry your horses, coachman, we have plenty of time before us."

How Farquhar hated him! How he hated the carriage! How he hated the coachman—fawning slave—for touching his infernal hat! Then he thought that he would get out. He was an Englishman, and Penguin had no right to imprison him. He would get out. He was just going to call to the man to stop, when it occurred to him that the Sergeant was a big

strong man, and would hold him down. They were in a solitary district. He could do nothing. He did nothing.

"You don't seem easy, Mr. Farquhar," said Penguin, as if it was the main business of his life to promote his companion's happiness.

"I—I am not very well. I have been reading hard, and I have been an invalid. I think, if you'll allow me, I will take a cab and go home."

"You can get no cab here," said the Sergeant. "The fresh air is just the thing for you. I saw it did you good the moment you came out, and began to converse in so lively a manner. A little reaction, but you will be all right presently. —Queen's Road, and then make for the Heath, coachman."

Again the fawning slave touched his infernal hat, and Farquhar wished the wretch would fall off his box in a fit of apoplexy, and be run over into the bargain. The Heath! He did not think that Penguin intended him personal harm, but there was a lunatic asylum somewhere at Hampstead! Was he going to be locked up? On the whole, he did not know that it would not be the best thing for him.

"This is a pleasanter look out than you had at Naybury, Mr. Farquhar, when you went there to tell Mrs. Dormer of the plot laid against her."

Many cruel blows are daily—to the credit of Hampstead—laid upon helpless donkeys there. But perhaps this was the hardest that had been heard there for some time. And the miserable donkey writhed, as we daily see his brethren do, but he had not a kick in him.

"Was this what you wanted to talk about?" he asked, humbly.

"Should I talk about it if I didn't want?" responded Sergeant Penguin, suddenly discharging from his tone all its rather studied courtesy.

"Well, I suppose not," said the victim, for want of any thing else to say.

"I suppose not, too," repeated Penguin; "I suppose not, too." The reiteration boded no good to Farquhar—it only meant that the learned Sergeant was taking time to consider whether the next instrument of torture should be the pincers or the screw. The pincers had it.

"I wonder you don't give yourself a real holiday, Mr. Farquhar, as the office is kind enough to spare your valuable services."

"I must read," pleaded George Farquhar.

"What for?"

"Why, for the Hall."

"You're never going to be so mad as to go up."

"Not go up! How am I to practice?"

"My good fellow, you have odd notions of a gentlemanly profession—very odd notions. Your father's a tradesman, you say, and that accounts for it perhaps, though many tradesmen are true gentlemen. But his case must be an exception. What's his trade?"

"He has retired," said Farquhar, looking very white, and speaking in a dogged manner, thus for the first time making an approach to resistance.

"Retired, has he? May one ask what he retired from?"

"Business," replied Farquhar, almost courageously.

"You may think your father's character a subject for joke," said Penguin; "that is matter of taste. If his calling was one you are ashamed to mention, perhaps you are right to conceal it. But I don't think he'll see much of a joke in your letter, telling him that at the instance of the Incorporated Law Society you are refused admission to the profession he designed you to adorn."

"I know that I am not up to the mark yet," said Farquhar, "but I have several months before me, and with the help of a coach I dare say I shall get through."

"Not with the help of a coach and six horses could you be dragged out of the mud in which you are wallowing, young fellow. I did not allude to your ignorance, which I dare say is gross enough, or you would not have lent yourself to crime; but I referred to your disgraceful conduct, which will, when represented to the Society, forever exclude you from your profession."

"You think so?" said Farquhar, with a timid sneer.

"No, no, I don't think so, I know so. And it will be my business and pleasure to make assurance in that matter double sure, for I will personally see every man who has a voice in the matter, and inform him of the facts. I hold every branch of the profession in too high honor knowingly to permit any one branch to be contaminated—contaminated."

He launched the word like a missile at Farquhar.

"You can do as you like," said the latter.

"You need not tell me that. I would rather hear from you—not that I care much about it —some sort of extenuation of your conduct."

"I have heard nothing about any conduct of mine."

"Why do you sit there" (why, indeed, thought Farquhar) "and utter such a falsehood? Have I not said that you went to Naybury to menace Mrs. Dormer, and that you have written out a statement of the most dastardly kind, for the purpose of helping a scoundrel to trade upon her terrors, or upon the kindness of her husband?"

"I have told nothing but the truth. And," said Farquhar, "you have no right to talk to me in this way, and I won't have it. I'll get out. Coachman, stop. Coachman, damn you, stop, I say!"

"Go on," said the deep voice of Mr. Sergeant Penguin, and he was the man's master for the time. Moreover, the coachman had the most aristocratic contempt for any body who lived in Judd Street.

"Do you ride in a gentleman's carriage so often, Mr. Farquhar, that you need be in such a hurry to get out of one?" was the next question.

"I don't choose to be insulted, and by a stranger," said Mr. Farquhar. "I don't believe

we ever met before. I have no recollection of it."

"Nor I," said Penguin, laughing scornfully; "and yet I've been to all the Trailbastons' parties for a good many seasons. What made you select that house for the scene of your fiction? Were you ever in it? Did you ever take a letter there from your employers, and so get a peep at the parlor? Which side of the hall is the parlor—come, answer that?"

"On the right."

"Yes, that's true. How many drawing-rooms are there?"

"I will answer no such insulting questions," said Farquhar. "If you don't stop, coachman, I'll knock you off your box!" he shouted, jumping up. But Mr. Sergeant Penguin's strong arm soon pressed him, gently enough, back into his place, and as the coachman looked round Penguin touched his forehead, significantly. The man grinned. He did not care, of course, whether Farquhar were mad or sane, but he knew where half a crown would presently come from.

"No, I am not," said Farquhar; "but it is enough to make me so. I don't speak another word, Sergeant Penguin. The journey must come to an end some time or other."

He would have lighted a cigar, but in his fluster of glory at driving out with the great barrister Farquhar had forgotten lights.

"Very well, my friend," said Sergeant Penguin. "I shall complete my drive, and I will drop you at the nearest point for Judd Street. It is quite on the cards that the next time you ride in a carriage it will be at the costs and charges of your sovereign, and you will not be able to bully the coachman, because there will be an iron-bound roof between him and you."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Farquhar, again turning pale. To do him justice, it was not the mere menace of prosecution that alarmed him, but the thought of the cruel old man at York, and his revenge.

"Speech is golden sometimes, when silence is pewter. The question certainly is a reasonable one, and it will be speedily answered by a couple of policemen, Mr. Farquhar."

"Do you mean that you have trapped me to give me in charge?" And he looked round hastily, as if meditating a jump from the carriage.

"No, Sir," said Sergeant Penguin, haughtily. "Some more of your ideas as to the dignity of the profession. But under my advice, after a perusal of the statements which you and your accomplice have prepared, and which the latter handed to me yesterday, Mr. Dormer brings you both before a police magistrate. It is possible that you may have a good answer to his charge; if so, do not tell it to me, as I may have to appear for him at a later period in the story."

A sudden and a brilliant thought flashed across poor Farquhar's brain.

"You are not retained against me, Sergeant Penguin?" he said.

"I am not, or I should not be riding with you."

"Then I retain you for myself," he said, suddenly laying his hand on the Sergeant's arm, and feeling in his own pocket for money for the fee he proposed to tender. "You must take the first retainer, you know."

The Sergeant was startled for a moment at the liberty with his sacred person, but the next instant he broke into a roar of laughter which made the Hampstead woods and hollows ring as in the olden time.

"What an awful ass you are!" he said.

The words were not exactly complimentary, but they were really the kindest which he had spoken to Farquhar, and they implied a gentler feeling than had hitherto actuated him. As with Æneas, when he had to avenge a cruel act, *jam, jamque magis cunctantem flectere sermo cœperat.*

"I believe I am," said Farquhar, prostrated by the shout the Sergeant had set up at him.

"You believe rightly then. But to discover one's folly is sometimes the first step toward becoming wise. Come, Mr. Farquhar, I have been rude enough to you, but remember that you have joined in a plot against my most intimate and valued friends, and it was natural that I should express my indignation. I have done so, and if you now like to get out of the carriage you can do so, as we are getting near a cab-standing, or I will take you nearer home. You can hardly accuse me of acting harshly toward you, when all I have done has been to tell you that your ridiculous plot is not worth a farthing, that Mr. Dormer defies you, that if Dudley be not now in custody he will be in a few hours, and that you will also be taken, unless, by-the-way, you like to make your escape, and

'High on bleak Hampstead's swarthy moor be starting for the North.'

But that, if it were right for me to give you any advice, I should not advise. Go home, be arrested, and send for a gentleman who practices in the police courts to advise you further. It is not for me to do so. I shall make no use, however, of any admissions you have made in this conversation."

Sergeant Penguin spoke this very kindly and impressively. Nobody could do so in a better way. And then, with a slight apologetic bow to Mr. Farquhar, he drew out from a side-pocket a huge brief, and apparently plunged over the head and ears of his mind into the case therein set forth. But he never paid less attention to a brief, though that is saying a good deal. His physical ears were open to catch the least word from George Farquhar.

That gentleman was crying.

Pride at starting—the sense of respectability—the sudden fall of the pride, and debasement of the respectability—the scorn—the menace—and the York terror, had nearly been too much for him. But when the great advocate, soon perhaps to be a judge, had unbent his angry brow, had gravely remonstrated, and had finished with kindly and almost forgiving words, poor George Farquhar, weak vessel as he was, broke down and sobbed.

"They do that in the dock a good deal, especially the worst lot," said the learned Sergeant to himself, "but seldom in private life. I have frightened that young beast. Wonder what he'll do next. Not embrace me, I hope."

But as it was impossible for him to pretend not to have heard the noise which Farquhar had made, he said, kindly,

"You are evidently ill. I don't like setting you down. Come on to my chambers, and have a glass of wine, and my clerk shall get you a cab. Not too fast, coachman."

George Farquhar gradually recovered himself, but the Sergeant spoke no further word to him, until addressed, in a hesitating manner,

"Sergeant Penguin, we may not have another opportunity of speaking."

"At chambers, if you like."

"Thank you, but I would rather not go there."

He had good reasons for not wishing to be seen in Gray's Inn, but, to do him justice once more, he did not like the idea of accepting any hospitality from one who had so openly avowed contempt for him. There were in his weak little heart nooks and corners into which scraps of good feeling had strayed, and they had not been washed out by his demoralization.

"Very well, as you please, of course," said the Sergeant, gravely.

"What you have said to me, though its manner was severe, was meant in more kindness than I had a right to expect at your hands, I having, unfortunately, been compelled to bear witness against your friends."

"False witness, Mr. Farquhar, and the compulsion a share in some hush-money. The falsehood has been detected, and the hush-money will not be paid. I have told you what will be done. And here is King's Cross. I can hardly take you nearer. Stop here, coachman."

The carriage stopped, and Mr. Farquhar opened his door. He leaned over to Penguin, and said, in a low voice, but earnestly,

"With the exception of one letter, it is as true as Heaven."

"What's that?"

"I dare not tell you."

"Mr. Farquhar," said the Sergeant, earnestly, "take time, and think. Nothing shall be done to-day. Do you understand? You have until to-morrow to think. Use the time—it holds your life to come."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

LOOSE ENDS.

A QUARTER of an hour after Sergeant Penguin had driven away from Judd Street with Mr. Farquhar another visitor to that gentleman arrived, and was marching up stairs with much alacrity, disregarding something mumbled to him by the servant, until the words "in a carriage" caught his ear.

"In a what?" roared Mr. Dudley.

"In a carriage, with two horses," repeated the domestic, not displeased to be able to disappoint the imperious visitor.

"Bother!" said Mr. Dudley, proceeding into the front-room. He was followed by the servant, who wished to enjoy her little triumph.

But she had better have remained below, for she was a good kind of a girl, who sometimes went to church when she said that she was going there, and was as honest as lodging-house morals would allow her to be. When she had presented to Mr. Dudley the smeared card which informed him of the companionship in which Mr. Farquhar had gone out, and he had glared frightfully at it, and at her, for a second or so, the terrific language which broke from him sent her out of the room, stopping her ears; and she halted not in her downward career until she ran into the arms of her mistress, cooking in the kitchen.

"It's a wonder the roof doesn't fall in upon him, that's all," was her explanation.

"Don't you talk about my roof falling in, will you?" replied her enraged patroness. "Who is it?—what do you mean?"

"The doctor, m'm. He's raging like a lion because Mr. Farkar have gone out. You never heard such words."

"I dare say I've heard words worse than you know of," replied her mistress. "But I'll be rid of Mr. Farkar once for all. I've often said it, and now I'll do it. He's a mean lodger, and I've always thought so."

While his landlady was thus summing up Mr. Farquhar's character below Mr. Dudley was relieving his mind in much more impulsive fashion above. But his mere anger soon departed, to give place to a different sentiment.

"I might have thought of that. I am the fool, the ass, the idiot. I might have known that though Dormer would not have gone after my witness, the lawyer was just the man to do it. He has taken him out of the way. A carriage and two horses—he has gone a long way—perhaps he has locked him up somewhere. The fellow is as weak as water, and Penguin is just the blusterer to give him fits. Or perhaps he'll go the smooth way to work, get out of him that he's in a low kind of way, and promise that he shall be set straight if he— If he *what?*" exclaimed Mr. Dudley, with a savage joy. "He can't. It's true—true, and they know it. I shall not lose the game yet. I was a fool for flying into such a rage. What do I care about Penguin pumping him? They can no more stir the facts before them than I can poke out a brick from that wall with my finger. But I will do what I meant to do, only without my friend Farquhar's assistance.

He went to the table, threw Mr. Farquhar's law books on the floor, and, taking a large sheet of paper, began to write.

But apparently he could not please himself, and after some further attempts he crumpled up the sheet and put it into his pocket. He then wrote a short note to Farquhar:

"Very glad you have seen him. Nothing could be luckier. But should like to hear how you managed him. Come to me as soon as you get home. B. D."

"Mustn't frighten him, or he'll get out of the way," said Mr. Dudley. He put Penguin's card into the note, to explain it the better, directed it, and left it on the table. His usual bang with the street door announced to the women, and indeed to the entire house and its neighbors, that Mr. Dudley had left the residence of his friend.

Having Sergeant Penguin's assurance that the day was Mr. Farquhar's own, the latter returned to his lodging, and found Dudley's note and his landlady's notice to quit. The former was satisfactory to him, as it gave him time to arrange his ideas; but the latter demanded explanation. He owed no rent, he had had no quarrel with his landlady. Why was he to be turned out?

In the revelation by the shuddering servant that Mr. Dudley had roared out the most horriblest things as ever proceeded out of a human mouth—(the words were her own, and may have been designed to save the rights of the Enemy)—and that her mistress had determined not to keep a lodger who had such visitors, Mr. Farquhar did not see much comfort.

"He was in a rage because I was out, Jane, I suppose? But when he knew where I was, he was pacified?"

"No, Sir; it was the sight of that card as made him fly out."

"Pooh! it was only his way. He has left me a joking kind of letter. Of course, if your mistress wants to get rid of me I must go; but it's very inconvenient, and very unfriendly, considering I've been here so long, tell her. However, I shall be in again by-and-by, and she can think over it."

"I'll name it to her, Sir."

"But I will not go to him," said Farquhar to himself. "If they come after him while I am there, I don't know that the Sergeant's promise would do me any good, and if they don't, it will only be another row with Dudley, and I've had enough of that sort of thing for one day. If I stay here, he'll be coming up again. And that notice to quit, that has disturbed me. In my present state of nerves every thing upsets me, I think. I'll get out of every body's way."

Meantime Dudley, who had returned home, waited for two or three hours in the expectation that Farquhar would arrive. But as the day wore on and George came not Dudley waxed impatient.

"I did not want to employ another person," he said at last. "But this fellow's going away; he'll forget all about it, and if he doesn't, no matter."

"I don't care to tell you exactly how I heard it, Lucy," said Grace Clare, who was sitting with the little egg-forger in her studio; "but it's true."

"Rydon—you know Jimmy Rydon—poor Ernest was very fond of him, and used to laugh at him so—well, he told me about the beating, but I couldn't get at what Wigram had said, and what the story is."

"There's another friend of yours could tell us, I dare say, if he liked," said Miss Clare; "but I should be afraid to ask him. I mean Walter."

"No," said Lucy, coloring up a little angrily at the recollection of her last interview with that officer; "he'll do nothing on my side. Mind, he's very good, and kind, and all that, and very fond of the children, but he has got his notions. What's the good of talking? all the men have them. We're only counters in the game, my dear, and when we are done with we are to be shoveled into the drawer."

"You've got quite—what do they call it?—of late, Lucy," said Grace. "Bother, what's the word?—there's mice in it. Misanthropical, that's what you've grown."

"Perhaps I have no reason?"

"Things might be much worse, you know, Lucy, as you would confess if you looked round, and noticed how badly some women have come off when changes took place."

"Very likely," said Lucy; "but that's cold comfort. But, Gracie, tell me something more about this story. You say it's all over Naybury. I am very sorry."

"Come, Lucy, you need not say that to me," said Grace Clare, "when I know it is making you as happy as a bird."

"No, it is not, at least only in a way. Of course, you can't expect me to be sorry for any thing that happens to *her*. She has come between me and my life, and I hate her. But do you think I am glad that Ernest should be annoyed, as he must be?"

"Annoyed—that's a way to talk of it! You're in earnest, Lucy, you are, to talk of annoyed when a man's wife is scandalized by a whole parish. I suppose he is suffering more than he ever suffered in his life."

"Yes, in his pride, which is the only part of a man that can really feel. Well, and I am sorry his pride should be wounded."

"You are not, and it's no good saying so. You are pleased that you have got a little revenge on him for—for not being here."

"Isn't it natural?"

"I don't say no; only what's the use of pretending with me? You can't think that I'm not on your side, though I am told I ought not to be. Mother says so."

"Quite right in her; but she's not the only one that is good enough to try to set you against me."

"Nobody does that; but I am told not to make or meddle. And when I got a letter telling me all about this Naybury business, and how the thing was common talk, and about Ernest's going down in a hurry—"

"Going down in a hurry?" said Lucy, turning white. "You did not tell me of that. Is he there now?"

"I'm sure I did mention it. But you don't half hear what people say to you now—you, who used to be so tremendously quick that you had answered before one had done talking."

"My head sometimes seems to wander," said Lucy; "but I should have remembered your saying that. What was it? Is he there now, I ask you?"

"No, I suppose not. But one day he sent a telegraph to her to come and meet him at the station, which she did."

"Of course she did. That shows rather a mean spirit."

"You wouldn't meet him at any station in England this evening if he were to tell you to? Don't be unjust, Lucy. Well, she came, and he scolded her very severely."

"That I don't believe. He never scolded a woman in his life."

"I repeat to you what I am told. And then he exclaimed that he would see her no more, and tried to throw himself under the railway train."

"My God!" gasped Lucy.

"Yes; but the train stopped in time, and he rushed into a carriage and came to London."

"And you mean to say that you told me this, and I forgot it? No, I won't believe that. Say you didn't, or I shall think that I am growing idiotic."

"I only said he had been to Naybury. To tell you the truth, I had not read the letter carefully, for it was written in such a beast of a hand that it was a morning's work to make it out."

"Then I think I guess who wrote it. Do you believe a word she says?"

"I don't see what interest she has in telling lies about the matter. Besides, I know that the scandal is about. I know it from a person I spoke to about the letter, and who advised me not to say any thing to you about it."

"Who was that? But don't tell me if you don't like."

"I said I should. Frank Beaumont."

"But he was never very fond of Ernest, nor Ernest of him. I do not understand," said Lucy Verner.

"I do," said Grace; "and it's all a part of what you were saying just now about counters. Frank's married—a very nice little wife he has got, too, and a perfect lady."

"How do you know?"

"How do I know, Mrs. Verner! Because I have done myself the honor of making Mrs. Beaumont a morning call," said Grace Clare, with affected dignity. "I was invited to breakfast, but I had already partaken of that meal. I was requested to inspect the state apartments, and they do much credit to her taste."

"Well, I'm sure," said Lucy. She pretended to laugh it off, but there was a real bitterness at her heart. Grace Clare was a girl of character, and could be spoken to by Francis Beaumont's young wife; whereas—but her meditations would be unedifying.

"I wish I knew where he was now," said Lucy.

"I could let you know that much," said Grace Clare, "but I don't think it would be for your good."

"Yes, do tell me, there's a dear thing! It is such a comfort to me to know that he is not at Naybury, and that every day he stops away makes—never mind, tell me where he is."

"He is at one of the hotels in Covent Garden. I can't say which, because I don't know, but there are very few. Now don't you go and do any thing foolish. I dare say you are going to tell me to mind my own business, and it would be right; but I should be very sorry to see you make a mistake that would injure the children. Mother and me were talking about it; you know mother's heart is very warm to you, though she has her notions, which are all right enough, as you'll confess, but that's nothing here nor there. What I mean is—don't be angry—"

"You may say any thing you like to me, Grace."

"Well, it's not a pleasant hint to give, but mother thought it might as well be given, and a friend is not a friend that's afraid to speak their mind at the right time. Mother was saying—don't put the words in my mouth, because I don't think the thing is quite what she does—she was saying that you might fancy that, because matters were going wrong in one place, they might be likely to go right in another; you know what she means."

"Yes."

"But, said mother, that may or may not be, and I think it's by no means certain that it would happen, even if every thing which is said could be lawfully proved; but she said—and that's the main thing, Lucy—I've known, she said, cases in which women, in trying to get back every thing, have lost what they had got left to them, and I'm sure that Lucy is not the woman to run any risk that might peril the welfare of these dear children. That's what mother said, and now I've run it off to you my mind is easier."

"Stay and have some tea."

"Thank you, m'm, but there is a little ceremony which I like to perform before having my tea, and that is eating my dinner. You've dined early, you needn't tell me that, and you needn't offer to give me a meat-tea, because in the first place you've got nobody at home to cook, and in the second place, and this highly confidential, I hate a meat-tea. In stricter confidence still, mother is doing herself the honor of making a fish-pudding for her child. So you see that I can't stop."

"I am very glad to have seen you."

"Well, why don't you go, says you? Why, the truth is—I don't know whether to say it or not; but I see that I have made you more downhearted than you were, and it's not pleasant to think that one has done that to a person in trouble. The truth is, that if you mind what you are about, Lucy, the thing you most wish for may be nearer than you think."

LUCY'S PATIENCE.

"Ah, you should not play with me!" said Lucy, flushing violently, and holding to a chair. "I am really very weak. What do you mean?"

"Why—well, I will say it. There is no doubt that he will separate."

"No doubt?" said Lucy, eagerly.

"No. He is very proud, you know that?"

"Yes—not the sort of pride you see every day, though I never quite understood it, even in our best days. But why do you say that it is certain?"

"Well, it seems that the scandal which has been discovered is of a sort that makes it impossible they should come together any more. In fact—" And a suggestive gesture conveyed the little actress's full meaning to her friend.

"How wickedly he has been treated!" said Lucy, indignantly. "They took advantage of knowing that it was necessary for him to marry a rich wife. What a wicked thing!"

"Good-by."

"Yes, I like her pitying him," said Grace to

herself, when she got outside the garden. "He deserves so much pity, doesn't he?"

And so, with a saucy laugh, she went on her way homeward.

Ernest Dormer had been absent from his hotel all day, but had returned at dusk, and eaten his solitary dinner, for men must eat, however they may be wounded by the conduct of their wives. He had then strolled out into the Piazza, lonely and uninviting enough at that hour, and especially a place to escape from. But Ernest was in no hurry to make his escape. He was keeping himself in seclusion, except from those who were engaged with him in the only business of his life, and unless a man wanders away from civilization altogether, he has no better chance of avoiding his friends than in keeping in some such district as Covent Garden. He is reasonably sure not to be spoken to except by some thinly-clad little Pariah, piteously afraid of the police, yet moved to wild daring for a half-penny.

Here Ernest beheld a little episode in the life of a hungry and ragged child. An elderly provincial gentleman had come out of his hotel, and was walking up and down, eating some grapes. A small bunch of them fell from his hand.

A small boy, who had been lurking somewhere in the gloom, darted to seize the little spoil, but his ill-shod foot slipped, and he fell before the gentleman, nearly tripping him up. Then set in a rapid but effective series of misfortunes to the child.

He struck his head very hard against the column at the door of the hotel.

The gentleman, angry at being nearly overturned, gave him a couple of severe blows with a cane.

He ran away, howling, which enraged a dog that was watching a truck, and the dog flew out and bit the half-naked leg.

Roaring with pain and terror, the boy cannoned into the very hand of a policeman, who seized him, but perceiving, as was perfectly plain, that he had no plunder upon him, simply boxed his ears.

His mother suddenly appeared round the corner, in time to see the officer let him go. She immediately punched his head, and dragged him away with a promise of a severe beating at home.

And he missed his grapes.

There—it is but the dirty history of a squalid child, and it is repeated, with variations, day by day in Covent Garden. While Ernest Dormer was considering what might be that child's views of the government of the universe a gentle voice said,

"Ernest!"

Lucy and her elder daughter stood before him.

CHAPTER XLIX.

LUCY'S MEDAL.

"WHAT, Lucy, and you too, Mopes?" said Ernest Dormer. "How do you both do? You are going to the theatre, of course. To Drury Lane?"

He was not pleased at the meeting, yet he had no reason to believe that it was other than an accident, and what else could he say?

"Oh, are we going to the theatre, mamma?" cried Mopes. "What a surprise for me! And here is papa who is going to take us. Oh, how nice!"

"You had better ask him, child," said Lucy, in an unkind voice. She finished with an unpleasant little laugh.

"Are we going with you, papa?"

"I am not going to the theatre, dear," said Ernest Dormer, kindly. "But it is close by, and if you like to take your mamma here are the tickets," he said, putting a sovereign into the child's hand.

"Give it back," said Lucy, sharply. "We are not going."

"Nay," said Ernest, as the child looked up wistfully. "I never take my presents back. It will do for another night, Mopes."

"I think you might have something else to say, Ernest," said Mrs. Verner, "when you meet us for the first time after so many months."

"And I have," said Dormer, calmly. "I am glad to see that you are looking well, and I hope that the Dormouse is well and merry."

"Oh, you can remember her pet name! That is wonderful. I am surprised that you do not call her Miss Ernesta Verner. Yes, I am well, and she is well, and Miss Verner, as you can see, is well. We are all so, and every thing is so in this world, and I hope you can give as good a report?"

All of which was said in the edgy, womanly tone which leaves one in doubt whether the next thing will be a burst of rage or of tears.

"I need not ask," said Ernest Dormer, "whether all business matters are properly and regularly attended to, because they are in the charge of Walter Latrobe, who is faithfulness itself."

"That is a thing you value much, I know," said Lucy.

"I do," replied Ernest.

"Well, then, I hope that you get as much of it as you deserve."

"I am sure I do, and it is something to get one's deserts, you know, Lucy," said Dormer, who now began to suspect that this meeting had not been unplanned, and who resolved that it should in no way complicate his position. The encounter was very unwelcome to him, not so much from the mere consideration that while engaged in an investigation of the most delicate kind he was having a nocturnal rendezvous with a person whose relations with him had been notorious, but because at this hour the incident jarred with his feelings. There was no wrong in his exchanging a few kind words with one who had been much to him, and was now nothing—and it would have been harsh to have avoided them, but Dormer was anxious to terminate the interview. Not the less that the brief minutes and Lucy's brief utterances had shown him that she was no longer the Lucy of the oth-

er day, but was harder, fiercer, bitterer. Why she had become so was another matter—we can not stand unraveling histories in the street. Enough that he would gladly have got away.

And Lucy saw this, instinctively, and felt that her chance was all but gone.

"Walk with me a little way, Ernest," she said, "for the sake of old times. That is, unless you are afraid."

Perhaps he would have complied had she not used those last words; for her request was made in a plaintive voice, and old times had meant a great deal for both of them. But the taunt was vulgar, and Ernest became firm.

"I can not," he said, gravely. "I have a most important engagement, for which I am already late."

"You were walking like a man going to an engagement, certainly," retorted Lucy. "We saw you with your head down, and going at the rate of two steps a minute, did we not, Maud?" And the appeal to the child was followed by another disagreeable laugh. If Lucy had come to Covent Garden for the express purpose of convincing Dormer that he need never think about her again, her manner could not have been better adapted to that end. But this she did not know, nor could she see that in parading her wrongs she was justifying them—as a man would think.

"It is true, however," said Ernest, "and I must say good-night; and I think, Mopes, that you had better let me give you another ticket, and then on another night you can take not only mamma, but the Dormouse to see the play."

He was putting his hand into a waistcoat-pocket, when Lucy snatched it away sharply.

"We did not come to meet you to ask for money, or to be sent away like relieved mendicants, and there was a time when you would have felt how such a thing grated on a woman's heart. But I suppose that you have been iced and frozen among your great friends, who require to be beaten with horsewhips before they can understand what is due to a woman."

"You might do me the justice to believe that I could not mean to offend you, Lucy."

"I believe nothing of the kind. I should be a fool indeed to suppose that you cared whether you wounded my feelings or not. But I hear that you are in trouble yourself, and I make all allowances for you."

Poor Lucy! To this style of attack she had come, she, who had been all patience, and submission, and hope, and who had, in her earlier impulses, spoken so nobly of the propriety of Ernest's sacrificing her for the sake of his position, and who had vowed so devoutly that she would wait and watch, and bring him back by offering him an ark of refuge when the floods should be out. And here she was, in the Piazza of Covent Garden, taunting him in the spirit of a milliner's romantic apprentice chiding a draper's faithless assistant. Clearly, her nature had not, in commercial phrase, answered sample.

"Well, then, I accept the allowances," said Ernest Dormer. "Good-by." And he tried to take a hand of each at the same time. Mopes's was placed at once in his, and rested there lovingly, but Lucy kept her hand away.

"Keep your hand and your heart together," she said; "and a pretty place you have found to keep them in, if all is true that people say. Yes, you can look as indignant as you please; but if your whip won't prevent persons from talking about your wife, I suppose your looks won't."

"The conversation has lasted as long as is good for either of us, Mrs. Verner," said Ernest Dormer, almost sternly. "Good-night."

He would have passed on, but she held him. Not sensationally, by the wrist, as became a wronged female of story, but by the more prosaic means of his coat. In practice this was wiser than the melodramatic method; for one may extricate a wrist from a clutch with a certain dignity, whereas to snatch a button-hole from a woman's fingers is a mean and ludicrous proceeding.

"Don't be angry with me, Ernest," she said, having fully attained to the conviction that she had offended him—his old voice had not changed, though hers had altered—"don't be angry with me. I am so wretched. If it had not been for *her* and the other you would have had very little money to send to me, only a little more for the church-yard fees; but I could not leave the children—I could not. And then I clung to the hope that some day we might be again what we were before—so happy—will the day ever come, Ernest? Say yes, and I will never say another bitter word, but go home and sit down, and wait till the day comes."

The answer of virtue was obvious, and her tone should have been stern and final. But virtue is not always to be heard after dark under the Piazza of Covent Garden, and upon this occasion her relative, good-nature, spoke for her, and most unsatisfactorily.

"Lucy, we none of us know what may happen, I don't say a long time hence, but in four-and-twenty hours. You must let me go my way."

"Go," she said, releasing her hold. "But recollect, whatever happens, that there is one person who would have died sooner than be false to you, and who now would lay down her poor life if you only thought it would do you any good."

Lucy glanced hastily round—there was no one near—she snatched his hand, kissed it hastily, and walked on.

It was a good exit; but she had taken such unconscious pains in the earlier part of the interview to make her language more than distasteful to a man of refinement, that Ernest must be forgiven, even by the least moral and most sentimental, for the hard thought that she had discovered her mistake, and had sought to redeem it by a piece of acting. Yet it was a hard thought, although not altogether an untrue

one. She did not know the change that had taken place in herself, or that the merry-eyed, pleasant girl of the Hut had become discontent, flippant, and even spiteful. She did not know that even her little pertnesses, which amused the man in the days when he and she were in perfect good-humor with each other, became offensive to him when feelings were changed. But she saw that she had given offense, and her last effort to set herself right, though it was, in truth, a studied effort, perhaps deserved a little more mercy than good persons are likely to bestow on it.

"She would not have lived," thought Ernest Dormer. "But they always say these things."

And the memory of a man who has lived about town supplies him with too many recollections of evil stories into which the terrible threat of all has come—happily, with few in which it has been more than a threat—happily or unhappily, with some in which it has answered its purpose.

Then he remembered what he had said to Mr. Haslop about a certain scheme of his own. And he almost smiled at the coincidence, deciding, of course, without the shadow of a doubt, that he had been in earnest in declaring a readiness to leave the world, while Lucy had merely been practicing a favorite trick of women.

"Good-evening, Mr. Dormer," said Mr. Dudley, raising his hat.

Ernest's hand mechanically arose to return the salute, but he recognized the face, and he made no reply.

"I would not intrude while you were in such very pleasant talk with a lady of my acquaintance. I only waited to say, in reference to our own interview, that business is business. Good-evening again, Sir."

If Lucy could have known the thought which flashed across the mind of Ernest Dormer she would have hurried back at greater speed than that at which she was, unawares, hastening homeward. Dormer was habitually just, or sought to be so; but on the present occasion he was in no mood for doing Lucy any justice, and Dudley's words had almost enraged him. Lucy was acquainted with that scoundrel. Had he brought her there to meet Ernest, that the meeting might be reported elsewhere? Had Dudley been listening behind one of the huge pillars? Ernest was in a state of mind that permitted him to suspect all this, and to think very bitterly indeed of the woman whose lips had just touched his hand. She was changed enough, he thought, in temper and manner, to let him suppose her changed at heart also. She had become a tool for his injury. He knew women too well to believe that gratitude would long hold its own against a sense of wrong, reinforced by temptation, but this was a very bad case indeed. He had behaved so very well to her—so very well—so much better than many of his friends, some of them rich men, had behaved in similar circumstances. But it did not much matter. He had graver things in hand, and what was the ingratitude of this miserable little creature in presence of the great trouble? With not much effort, and with some bitter contempt, he banished the subject from his mind, to which there returned from time to time only the impression that something new and disagreeable had occurred to him.

He did Lucy entire injustice, so far as Dudley was concerned. The latter knew her and her history, for Mrs. Faunt had been his informant, and had pointed her out on one occasion to Dudley. But he had never even spoken to her. Nor would Lucy, at that time, in spite of all her deterioration and all her sense of wrong, have lent herself to any thing calculated to injure Ernest Dormer. That she would not have gone into any little plot which she might believe would have assisted in detaching him from certain ties it is too much to say, for such self-denial would be more than reasonable men would expect from many women of a better type than Lucy Verner. But she spoke the truth in saying that she had never been false to him in any sense. There need be no compassion for her, however, because injustice was done her. People who behave ill must expect a little injustice, unless they are very successful, and Lucy had failed. Besides, it was good for Ernest Dormer, at this time, that he should think as badly of her as possible. Any thing were better than that in his trouble he should seek for consolation in reverting to old relationships, as Lucy had declared her hope that he would do. A moralist must feel sincere satisfaction in recording the discomfiture of this objectionable young woman, and if he abstains from pointing out the moral to be derived therefrom, it is only out of respect for the intelligence of readers, who know why the evil almost always come to grief in this world.

But Lucy did not believe that the game was lost. She had begun carelessly, but she had received a sharp lesson, and had profited by it. She was very angry, and also very much shocked, at the proof that Ernest Dormer regarded her with distaste; but she had made an effort, and had, as she thought, done much to recover her position. It may be said, in confidence, that it takes a great deal to crush a woman's belief in her future, and it may be said, not in irreverence, that Heaven knows, considering what is some women's present, that it is a merciful arrangement which keeps hope so fresh in the hearts of those who are denied the more potent comfort of action.

During the first part of the walk home poor Mopes had been remorselessly silenced when she sought to talk to her mother. But gradually, and as Mrs. Verner began to be reassured as to her position with Dormer, and to dwell upon his last words rather than on her own—a point sometimes forgotten by afflicted egotism—Lucy became softer, and she slackened her pace and spoke kindly to the child, who needed little encouragement to pour out her soul.

"I wish you had let me take the other money, mamma, that papa was going to give me."

"Do you? Why, dear?"

"Because it was for the Mouse. But it does not signify, because I will give her half of mine."

"But you forget what it was given you for?"

"To take you to the play. Oh, but that was only fun. You know how fond he is of saying things gravely and setting you thinking, and then you find out that they are all fun. But you shall have the money, if you like, mamma. Here it is; take it, please."

"Yes, dear, I will take it. But I will give you another, exactly like it, as soon as we get home."

"Why do you want to change it, mamma?"

"Because I want to have this one, that is all. Yours shall be just as good."

"I suppose you mean to keep it for a medal, like the one with the bee-hive on it that I got for grammar. Have you done something good, that you give yourself a medal, mamma?"

"Perhaps."

"Papa was displeased at first, but you made it up with him, mamma, so nicely. I could not help crying, but nobody saw me."

"You think I made it up, do you, Mopes?" said Lucy, stopping, and looking earnestly into the child's face.

"Why, who wouldn't be friends when one kisses their hand?" asked Mopes, innocently. The speech did not exactly vindicate her right to the grammar medal, but it pleased her mother, at that moment, more than she could say, except by a little laugh, in which was something of the old tone.

CHAPTER L.

AN ARM IN A SLING.

It was not, perhaps, very conscientious to undertake the medical care of a ship of emigrants when he knew so very little about medicine, but Mr. James Poult had to live, and it was something to his credit that instead of enjoying himself about London during the weeks previous to his embarkation, he engaged himself to stand behind Dudley's counter, in order to acquire knowledge of some drugs by vending them. The red-headed young fellow really used his red head in the best way he could, and was gradually acquiring some practical knowledge of one department at least of the business which he was to do on the ocean. Let not Mr. Poult, or those who appointed him, be blamed in respect of his appointment. He had all proper testimonials. How he obtained them, or what was their value, is no affair of ours. But both he and his employers had a complete legal answer to any complaint that could arise in regard to the failure of his professional treatment of any emigrant whom he might forward on a still longer journey than the unfortunate person had intended to make. When duly signed documents declare that a man is qualified for his work, there is no more responsibility for any body in this world. At the same time, one is a little sorry for the emigrants.

Mr. Dudley had not, it would seem, quite taken the measure of his temporary assistant. Having waited so long for Mr. Farquhar that Dudley's patience evaporated, he called in Mr. Poult.

"You write a much better hand than I do, Mr. Poult, and I have something here which should be legibly copied. Do you mind doing it for me? I'll see to the shop. Here are paper and things." And he gave Mr. Poult the two statements which we have heard read. Mr. Poult signified his assent, and was left to his work.

But in a few minutes he came out of the little room, with his face as red as his hair.

"Done it already?" said Dudley. "Why, you are the patent pen that writes faster than the holder thinks—though that's nothing new, by-the-way."

"I began it, I'm sorry to say," said Mr. Poult, angrily, "but I didn't get far. Don't you offer me any thing of that sort again, that's all."

And he went to his legitimate avocation, snorting furiously, and showing a gentleman's feelings.

Mr. Dudley looked at him savagely, and then felt inclined to favor him with some insolent compliment to the delicate mind of a beggarly emigrants' doctor. But whether something in the eye in that red head made Mr. Dudley surmise that his own head might not escape scathless if he indulged in license of tongue, or whether he thought that the less said upon the subject of the documents the better, he made no remark, and returned to his parlor, leaving Mr. Poult to calm his mind by mathematical division of a flat mass of rhubarb powder.

Emerging from his den in about an hour, Mr. Dudley, decently attired, and even humiliated into gloves, passed through the shop without deigning notice to his assistant, and went out.

"I had expected you, as you would be aware, Mr. Dudley," said Mr. Henry Wigram, as the medical gentleman took a chair in Mr. Wigram's pleasant drawing-room in Cork Street.

The room, we observe, was pleasant enough—a bachelor's chambers, with evidence that the bachelor had tastes, and had spinster friends, or others, who wrought prettinesses for him. But there was no pleasantness in the face of the owner, whose right arm was in a sling, and whose affected melancholy of tone had given place to a real irritability which he took small pains to conceal.

"I supposed that you would do so, or I should not have intruded. I regret to see that you are disabled."

"I am not disabled, but it is more comfortable to have a rest for my arm."

"A gun accident, perhaps?" said Mr. Dudley, who knew better.

"Gun—no," replied Mr. Wigram, testily.

"I judged so from seeing that you are a sportsman," said Mr. Dudley, looking at a stuffed Norway owl of great beauty. "Your own killing, no doubt?" he added, gravely.

"Is the man a fool?" thought Mr. Wigram.

We need not say that Mr. Dudley was not exactly a fool, and that he only wanted a little time to see what Mr. Wigram was, not in the least caring what estimate Wigram might form of him.

"Kill that! No," said Mr. Wigram, shortly. "I hurt my wrist, that is all."

"You remind me of a remark made by my late eminent friend, the lamented Abernethy; when I say friend, I make allowance for the disparity of our ages, he being a man advanced in life when I was but a youth; but he was good enough to fancy he saw something in me. He was visited by a lady who said that she had only got a cold. 'Only!' he roared—you are aware that his manner was rough, though his heart was good—'Only! Would the woman have the plague?'"

"Don't see how this brutality of his bears on my wrist."

"You speak lightly of one of the most troublesome of casualties. I have known the effects of a sprained wrist to be felt for years. But, of course, you are in the best hands."

"I suppose so. All doctors are fools; but some annoy you with their folly less than others, and so you get well sooner."

"Nay, I must deprecate so sweeping a charge against a profession of which I have the honor to be an humble member."

"Oh, are you?" said Mr. Wigram, not seeming to care in the slightest degree what answer he received. "I didn't know. I spoke generally, of course. What did you want to say to me?"

"The person who wrote did not explain that?"

"I should not ask you if she had," said Wigram, rudely. "I mean," he added, recollecting that he was being very rude, "I should not give you the trouble of an explanation."

"You know the person who wrote to you?"

"Well, just. Enough, I suppose she thought, to justify her writing. "I don't, but it doesn't matter. You know her, of course?"

"Yes, well."

"Then it just occurs to me that you might have done what you want straight through her."

"I understood you—forgive me if I mistake—to imply that you were not aware of my object."

"Well, no, not exactly," said Wigram. He had carelessly allowed himself to be bowled out, but he was much too case-hardened to care about it. Only he did not now think that Dudley was precisely a fool. "You want some service of some kind from me, and if it is in my way I will manage it," he added.

"That is very kind to a stranger, and I may thank somebody who has interested you in my wishes," said Dudley, with well sustained gravity. "I will not trespass on your time, especially as you are an invalid. It is of importance to me to have a letter delivered in Naybury, a place which you may know."

"I know there's a post to Naybury, because I write there sometimes."

"No doubt. But I have reason to think that certain persons may be interested in preventing my letter from reaching the hand for which it is intended, and that unless it were intrusted to some special embassador it would never be delivered. May I infer that you could insure its safe arrival?"

"I dare say that I can."

"Pardon me if I remark that the importance of the letter prevents my leaving the matter in any doubt."

"I may say that I am sure I can."

"And—forgive me—immediately?"

"I will send it immediately. I can not answer for its delivery for a day or two."

"That implies that you do not send it to a person absolutely at your command, but to a friend?"

"I'll do the best I can for you, Mr.—a—Dudley," said Wigram, impatiently; "I can say no more. I dare say your letter, if you give it me to-day, will be delivered to-morrow; but I don't keep a queen's messenger in my service. If you like to leave it on that understanding you can."

"Most gladly," said Mr. Dudley, producing a letter bearing only a line of direction. "You will see, Mr. Wigram, that I have simply addressed it to ——."

"I shall see nothing of the kind," said Mr. Wigram, disengaging his arm from the sling, and putting the letter into a larger envelope, inside which he scrawled a few words.

"There," he said, fastening it, "I know nothing of your letter; but I will forward it to a safe person by to-night's post."

"I have only to thank you most heartily, Mr. Wigram."

"Not at all. Good-morning."

They had both played their comedy very well, considering that each knew perfectly well the sentiments of the other in regard to the business in hand. Mr. Wigram, as the door closed on Mr. Dudley, was quite aware that the latter had no doubt as to the person who would deliver the letter, or as to the reason which made Mr. Wigram ready to undertake the charge of transmitting it; and Mr. Dudley, as he closed that door, fully believed that before he was out of the street Mr. Wigram would have reopened, not only his own envelope, but the letter within. But then Mrs. Faunt, who had upon this occasion brought two gentlemen together, was so very disreputable a correspondent and acquaintance, that they owed it to themselves and to one another, sitting in an elegant drawing-room at the West End, to ask hypocrisy to make a slight sacrifice to The Proprieties—superior goddesses in the Christian mythology.

It is due to Mr. Wigram to say, that though he tore off his own envelope without scruple, he considered for a moment over the inclosed letter.

"There's nothing in opening the letter of a fellow like that, and a friend of Faunt's," he said; "in fact I owe it to myself to know what I am sending off under my own handwriting; but how far is it wise in me to be aware of his story? I hate Dormer like the devil now, and I hope he will come to the bad; but, on the whole, I had better not know more of the details than I do. Master George has told me all I absolutely want, and will tell me more—no, I won't open the cad's letter—at least I think not. Any how, I'll write my own first."

Which he did, and this was the letter to Mrs. De Gully:

"Cork Street. *Thursday.*

"Dear Julia,—I can't quite understand your tone, but you poetical women are usually plain enough on one prosaic subject—you never leave a fellow in any sort of doubt when you want money. It is low-water with me just now, and I don't see my way to doing any thing when no consideration is shown to my wishes. The reciprocity is all on one side, Mrs. Julia. But I inclose a letter, of the contents of which I know nothing whatever; but the writer, of whom I know about as much, wishes it delivered secretly and safely. When I hear from you that this has been done (by yourself, mind) I shall be in a better humor to reconsider your Obliging Favor of yesterday. And as I am going out of town on Saturday, it might be convenient to you to let me hear that morning. But don't do it unless you like; and if you would rather not, return me the letter by Saturday. With a thousand affectionate messages from your attached brother, H. W."

"What makes that fellow think that the letter would not be delivered in the regular way?" pondered Mr. Henry Wigram, leaving the note to his sister open, that he might reperuse it and see whether it were explicit enough. "He must have some reason for thinking it. Who should stop it? There's only her father and mother, and they are not folks to interfere, from what I've heard. But Faunt has given him the hint, that's clear. She said that they had quarreled, and that she would never work with him again; but that's nothing—she's soon squared, and now they're running together once more, I take it. Very bad lot, and I shall not wonder to read that they'll land themselves cleverly before the judge at the Old Bailey. I don't think that she has any letters of mine in the old time. None written to her, that I'll swear; but one is so cursedly foolish at twenty. Can't quite hate her, that old Faunt, either, when one remembers some things."

And the estimable young man's mind went back into the past, and his heart softened at reminiscences which, however, might not have exactly the same effect on good people, and so we will not peep over the tablets of his memory.

He sent off the letters in due time for that night's post. They were just leaving Euston Square when Lucy Verner was telling Ernest that some one had never been false to him, and he had told her that no man knew what would happen in twenty-four hours.

Mr. Dudley walked home slowly, contrary to his usual bustling habit. He even turned down the Arcade, though it had been long shorn of the kind of artistic attraction which used to collect men of his stamp round certain windows. He strolled along Piccadilly, and did not scowl at the carriages of the wealthy. He should never buy a carriage, he thought, but persons of property had a right to lay out their money as they pleased. He was tolerant, and stood back readily enough while a bishop's vehicle hurried on that its owner might not be too late to vote against an Education Bill—nor did Mr. Dudley, though he saw the mitre on the carriage, mutter any thing about bloated priests—an odd omission, as that kind of comment on the hierarchy was rather usual with him. He passed through three or four groups of fashionably arrayed men and women, talking what he would at other times have called class-cackle; but he passed through courteously, and had an admiring eye for the grace and beauty of the girls. He even made a small concession to the Establishment—he set his watch by the clock of St. James's Church. Then the current of his mind changed, and he hastily turned off to the left, and sought his own district.

When he reached home he found Mr. Farquhar waiting for him.

Now he had, for the moment, put Mr. Farquhar out of his memory; and though George, as Dudley supposed, had come in obedience to the summons left in Judd Street, Mr. Dudley was rather displeased to see him than not. Dudley had now done all that he could do, for the hour, and he was not in the mood to recall the process by which he had reached the present point. Had any reasonably strong sort of man, who did not mind a little robust talk, come in Dudley's way, and taken him away to dinner, the chances are that the new acquaintance would have conceived a regard, or at least a liking, for Mr. Dudley, and set him down as a well-read, clear-headed man, a little inclined to be dictatorial, but earnest in his efforts after truth. Sunshine, which makes the dreariest hovel cheerful, had broken in upon Mr. Dudley, or he thought so, and the result was a temporary improvement in his bearing. But he did not want Farquhar just then.

"Ah, George," he said, carelessly.

"How are you? I could not get here sooner. I'll tell you why presently."

"Don't take the trouble. I have done without you."

"Without me—how do you mean, Dudley?"

"You are a very clever young man, Mr. Farquhar, and you have very distinguished visitors, who take you out in very fine coaches, and all that, but it is just possible that you may not be absolutely indispensable to every body."

"When you have done chaffing we can go on."

"I was never less inclined to chaff, George.

And unless you have something very particular to say, I would ask you to look in on me another time, as I have business with Mr. Poult."

"Oh, very well," said George Farquhar. "Good-day, I'm sure."

And he went out, looking more delighted at having received this decided snubbing than he could have been at the most friendly reception which Dudley could have given him.

CHAPTER LI.

ERNEST DORMER.

HITHERTO we have little opportunity of knowing Ernest Dormer except as the world knows a man—by his actions and his words. But as the crisis of his life approaches, and we have to see how he meets it, let us recall a few passages in his earlier history. They have not been necessary to us previously, and, as was said long ago, we elected to abandon the conventional course of introducing a hero with a biography in his hand, and to allow the reader to become acquainted with him by the simpler process of observation. But there is now a reason for saying something of his life prior to his making the friendship of Mr. Conway at the window of the Geographical Society.

Ernest Dormer was the son of a gentleman who held a situation in one of the higher of the public departments, and who received a large salary for his services to a liberal public. The elder Dormer was an educated and otherwise accomplished man, who did his duty reasonably well, but who found his enjoyment in private study of a scientific nature. He was energetic enough in this occupation, but in worldly matters indolent and procrastinating; and his two children, whose mother had died in giving birth to the younger, a daughter, were speedily destined to suffer by this characteristic of their father. For some years the small household at Hampstead went pleasantly enough. Mr. Dormer's income enabled him to surround himself with all the comforts and many of the luxuries of upper-middle class life, and he paid sufficient attention to his children to see that they were duly cared for, though he sought but little of their companionship. Ernest was placed at one of the best schools in the neighborhood, and Rosa had an excellent nurse, who was in due course succeeded by an excellent governess. The boy grew up handsome and manly, and with more than average intelligence, and the girl was developing into maidenly beauty when Mr. Dormer suddenly died of subtle and unsuspected disease of the heart. At this time Ernest Dormer was twenty, and was qualifying himself for the profession of a surgeon. Rosa was seventeen.

When the elder Dormer's affairs were looked into it was found that with the exception of about three hundred pounds in his bankers' hands, and a debt of somewhat larger amount due to him from a friend who had gone to Brazil, the children had no resources.

He had not even performed "the other Whole Duty of Man." His life was unassured.

To his friends, except two or three, who knew the truth, the affectionate love of his children offered the excuse, apparently borne out by the manner of his death, that the assurance offices would not accept the proposals of a man affected as he had proved to be. It was known only to Ernest Dormer, to his sister, and to two or three others, that the disease had been so hidden that not only Mr. Dormer, but the medical advisers to a distinguished office, had been unaware of its existence. He had proposed, had been examined, and accepted, and his procrastinating nature alone had prevented his paying the premium, and providing for his children. Several entries in his diary testified to his having the matter constantly in his mind, and to his resolve to perform the act of duty and humanity; but it was somehow left undone, and Mr. Dormer's children were without provision.

The death of Mrs. Dormer had estranged her husband from some wealthy members of her family. There was no quarrel, but he took no pains to keep up the friendship; and in such circumstances every one knows how ties are dissolved, and how soon and how complacently those who were intimate come to say that it is an age since they met, and that at no much more advanced date they say that they never hear any thing of one another. And wealth expects attention, which there was no one in Mr. Dormer's house to pay. He gave his day to his office, his evening to his study, refused invitations from his wife's relations, and never called on them. Ernest the school-boy was not careful in the matter, nor was Ernest the medical student, and Rosa was little more than a child, and, moreover, having a little more than a child's waywardness, disliked her mother's kin, and eschewed them.

We have heard of two of them in connection with Ernest's marriage—the Stepneys. Of Mr. Stepney, the younger Dormer, in his passionate talk with his friend Latrobe, had been pleased to say that Mr. Dormer had made him. Allowing for filial coloring, this statement was not far from the truth. Mr. Dormer had been the means of procuring for his brother-in-law some introductions to influential persons, through whose favor (it was before the present golden age when every thing goes by merit) he obtained certain lucrative contracts which were the solid foundation of his handsome fortune. Nor was Mr. Stepney as ungrateful as it is the normal condition of obliged relatives to be. He would have done a good deal for his nephew and niece had he been properly and respectfully solicited to take their interests in hand, and eight or nine years after Mr. Dormer's death he showed, without much solicitation, that he had not forgotten his brother-in-law's kindness. This was not very cordially admitted by Ernest Dormer in the conversation to which we have referred.

But at the time of the death Ernest was not wise enough to make a friend of his uncle, and at that period his aunt, Mrs. Stepney, had influence enough with her husband to prevent his voluntarily doing much for the young Dormers.

Ernest Dormer found himself thus without means, and in charge of a young and beautiful sister.

We have no episodical history of Rosa Dormer to introduce. Our business is with her brother. Her tale is soon told.

Ernest accepted the charge with pride, and resolved to acquit himself of it gallantly. And he did. Devotedly attached to Rosa, he resolved to set himself to the struggle of life, and not to flinch until he should have secured for her the position to which she would have looked, as of right, had her father lived and prospered. Their actual money was next to nothing, but with it, and with the proceeds of the sale of Mr. Dormer's library and scientific apparatus (he left few debts, for his creditors did not procrastinate, and he would pay when stringent demand was made), Ernest had enough to enable him to face the first year or two had he or Rosa been accustomed to practice economy. They removed into small, but comfortable lodgings, and declared to one another that they were going to be very attached, very wise, and very happy.

And Ernest did his best. He worked hard at his profession, and he gained a little money by contributions to certain journals. It was very little, and the contributions were boyish enough, and he even knew it, but was proud that he could make some additions to his sister's comforts. He loved her, and delighted in her. What he could teach her, or rather what she would learn, he taught her, and he contrived by various means, and through his acquaintances, to obtain masters for what he could not teach—some gave occasional lessons as matter of friendship, some took a small remuneration because they were themselves in a small way. And he was never prouder than when he unexpectedly received rather a handsome sum for a short Christmas story, and with that money he obtained ten singing lessons for Rosa from one of the great vocalists of the day, to have been taught by whom was a glory and distinction among the virgins who played upon the timbrels.

He would deny her nothing, even when he felt that she ought to have been denied much. And Rosa loved dress and amusement, and there was no one to check her passion for either. What did Ernest know about dress? and as for amusement, he was never happier than when he could take her to an opera stall, and look at her as the prettiest girl in the house, and by no means the worst dressed one. Add that neither knew much about economy, and the fate of their little stock will soon be guessed.

Their means dwindled; but Ernest did not fear the future, and he worked all the harder, and loved his sister the more that they were coming on hard days.

The days did get very hard; but the young couple escaped humiliation, and began to practice the economy which was now forced upon them, and which, earlier, would have made privation needless. There was privation, but it was for one of them only. Ernest denied himself many a comfort, often with a pardonable fiction, but Rosa was well cared for. Dress, however, and amusement both became things of the past, and it was plain that for some years the brother and sister must be rigidly careful, and find their happiness in the society of each other.

For this Ernest Dormer was ready, and he did his best to cheer his beautiful sister, and point to her the end of their transition state. He should soon be earning professional gains, and then all would go well. In the mean time his little Rosa must live quietly with him, and smile, and be sure that she should have the best of all that came to their lot. They would live to laugh at their little penuries and carefulnesses, and, after all, the trial was not very heavy at their time of life. Rosa smiled at first, then more rarely, and lastly not at all, on Ernest.

But she smiled too much in another direction, and one evening when he returned from the hospital, bringing her some beautiful flowers, given him by a fellow-student in a rage of disappointment at not being able to meet her for whom that costly bouquet was designed, the brother found that the sister had deserted him.

A short note, cold enough—but how could she make such a note warmer?—apprised him that she was unequal to the miserable life to which they were destined, and of which, though he was sanguine enough to see the end, she could not. He would struggle upward more easily without the clog of a sister, and she had resolved on taking her own course, and using the talents which she had taken so much pains to cultivate. She wished him all happiness, and hoped that in another land she should hear of his success.

Rosa Dormer did not say, but Ernest had small pains to discover, that she had eloped with the distinguished and married vocalist who had taken Ernest's ten guineas for the lessons. The great singer was an impulsive person, and quite unable to restrain his admiration for beauty of any kind, in art or nature, and indeed talked French-artist cant about its being a blasphemy to do so. He departed for America with Rosa Dormer.

Then Ernest Dormer, with a direr curse than should come from the heart of a young man—and it came deadly hot from his—flung up the cards.

It would be unprofitable to account in detail for his life for the next seven years. It was nearly as undesirable a life as a man could lead. Not quite, for he did not play the hypocrite, and thereby bring good things into ridicule in the eyes of those who knew him. Not quite, for he never stooped to blackguardism or savagery, even at his wildest. Not quite, let us

add, for he never utterly lost sight of a hope, which ultimately became a resolution, that one day he would help himself (he was not weak fool enough to expect to be helped) out of the careless, aimless, lawless life into which he had voluntarily drifted.

Of course we know, and he knew as well as we do, that his sister's misconduct gave no excuse for his. He could not help suffering—it was natural that he should suffer; but his duty was to go on as before, working hard, practicing economy, and preparing himself for an honorable profession. He was the more bound to do this because he had distinct views of the future, and used to hold them up to Rosa for her consolation in the intermediate period of trial and trouble. His abandonment of his duty was very deliberate, and there is no excuse for him which a moralist can offer.

For those who know what sort of a life a young man without any scruples, except those which spring from what is called gentlemanly instinct, can live in London, it is needless to sketch Ernest Dormer's career. His own chief marvels in after-days were twain; first, how he managed to get through the years; and, secondly, how he managed to get so much evil enjoyment with so little money. For you will not suppose that he was miserable, or sat gnashing his teeth and complaining of destiny. When he thought of Rosa the hot blood rushed to his face, and too often the hot word to his lip. But he excluded the thought—we can do much in this way, though weak persons deny it—as much as possible; and when it was not with him he was not miserable at all. He had abandoned upward exertion, and allowed himself to slide downward to a level at which, though he was doing no good and much harm to himself, he was not unhappy, as he ought to have been. He did not curse destiny, but he accepted it, or what he chose to call so. He made a large number of acquaintances, many of them persons below his own rank (if an almost penniless man, who chooses to be almost idle, can be said to have any rank), and some of his own grade in former days, and amidst this motley connection Dormer managed to spend a life of which he ought to have been ashamed, but which was seldom unhappy. Among his more harmless exploits was the falling in love (and usually, but not always, at various times), with good but not educated girls whom he met in the houses of his less distinguished friends; and how he abstained from becoming a husband during this period astonished himself even more than it astonished many a handsome and loving girl who would gladly have become his wife, and would have fought the fight faithfully and affectionately, as Rosa should have done. But Ernest always had his eye on that little bit of horizon light, and it preserved him from a marriage that would have given him much present comfort, but less in the after-time when he should have resumed his place in the world. But let not the impression be given that upon any part of this period of Ernest Dormer's life one who loved him could look without sorrow. Those years were worse than wasted.

That he got deeply in debt—deeply, that is, for a man who had no right to owe a shilling, seeing that he had no certainty of earning a sixpence—will be inferred by those who, as we have said, know something of such a life. For a good deal of this debt he really obtained value in some way, and the people who lend you wine, and watches, and stones that are not precious, except to the lender, were not very hard upon him—it can hardly be said that he was cheated much—not at all if the amount of pleasure which an impecunious man derives from receiving any sum of money be taken into account. It puzzles many worthy folks, who never were asked twice for a debt in all their lives, how other folks who are asked for debts a great many times, and even then do not pay them, can get so deeply involved, and much blame is attached to the careless persons who give such credit when they know their danger. We are not called on to solve the puzzle, but the fact is of everyday occurrence; and in Ernest Dormer's case, after he had muddled and scrambled on for about seven years, picking up small gains, and living in tolerable comfort, the amount came—he was obliged to find it out—to nearly eighteen hundred pounds. He always had the sense to see that this kind of thing must be stopped one of these days—he had the resolution to say, when he had done the above sum, that the day had come.

We have hinted that the arithmetical process was not performed voluntarily. Something made a creditor lose patience—perhaps Ernest Dormer had laughed at him instead of talking to him respectfully—perhaps had written him what an outraged tailor is known to have described as a string of wittykisms—or had otherwise vexed the tradesmanly mind. It became simply a matter of forbearance whether Mr. Ernest Dormer went to prison or did not.

He did not; for he made up the matter temporarily with his good-natured creditor—the creature is exceedingly good-natured, nay, kind, if properly treated (a fact of which happy and wealthy fictionists who draw savage and brutal tradesmen are, one is glad to know, utterly unaware)—and he resolved that his uncle Stepney should pay his debts.

Even uncles sometimes do such things in a generous manner, though it may be amiss for the rising generation to speculate too much upon finding such aid in the hour of need.

Mr. Stepney was not exactly generous, but perhaps he was something better, he was practical. He desired his solicitor to settle Ernest's debts, and of course to pay as little as he could to the holders of bills. The solicitor was much too fine a gentleman to do the business well, and did not condescend to make bargains, so that Mr. Stepney had to pay the debts very nearly in full. The only creditors who were beaten down were honest ones who were too glad to get any money at all, and they made compromises which the bill-men refused.

The benevolent uncle then took the liberty of asking the redeemed nephew what he intended to do for the future.

"You have retired from business, uncle, or I should ask you to give me a high desk and stool in your counting-house. But can you not get me one in the house of some friend of yours?"

"You a clerk, Ernest?" said Mr. Stepney.

"A clerk with mustaches!" said his aunt. "Pray don't talk such nonsense, Ernest."

But at dinner-time he had no mustaches, and his luxuriant whiskers were cropped to modest dimensions, and when the cloth was removed he said,

"Now, aunt and uncle, may I resume the question of a clerkship?"

"What have you gone and made yourself that fright for?" said Mrs. Stepney, who, in spite of her religious tendencies, had an admiration for manly beauty.

"I have cut my hair off, aunt; but I hope that I shall be luckier than Samson in similar circumstances. I trust I am stronger—strong enough for the place I want."

"Ah, Ernest," said his aunt, "I am afraid that you could find other parallels between yourself and Samson, but we will not speak lightly of sacred names. The change in you is hideous, my dear boy, but I am glad that you are so much in earnest—perfectly hideous."

"Yes, that looks like business," said his uncle. "Help your aunt to some port, and dine with us again on Wednesday."

It was not exactly a high desk and stool which his uncle got for him, but a comfortable chair and imposing table, and a quantity of correspondence to do, and he buckled to it and did it well; and when he received his first week's salary he wondered why he had not been earning money regularly for seven years. Nobody but those who have tried both alternatives of receipt know the moral value of a salary paid on a given day. That is the true secret of the virtue of young men of business, if they have virtue.

Ernest had foreign correspondence as well as native to conduct. But here an incident of significance occurred. He spoke French and German very fluently, but was singularly incensed, for a man of good-temper and self-command, at finding that he spelled both very badly, and that he used certain vulgarisms, or at least familiarities.

"Our correspondent in Berlin is a lady, Mr. Dormer. I suppose that is why you are so very affectionate. But our firm is married, so the attention is thrown away, unless you like to sign the letter yourself. Who was your German professor?"

So spoke one of Dormer's employers, with a laughing look at the enraged scribe. However, he took counsel, and a teacher who could spell.

For nearly three years Dormer worked steadily and well at the task he had undertaken. Let it be mentioned, that as soon as he had funds enough he went to the creditors who had compromised their claims, and paid them in full. Then he left their quarter of the town, and thenceforth drew himself away as completely as he could from all his haunts during his period of obscuration, and from most of the acquaintances of those days. More than once he did this last in a way which gave much offense, and made him enemies, in talk at least, for the rest of his life. But it was in Dormer's nature to do nothing by halves.

At the end of the time we have mentioned he resigned his position with all due form, and explained to his uncle and aunt that he had now the means of living, and that he should adopt a new calling, that of literature, which he preferred to writing letters.

But Ernest Dormer did not tell his uncle and aunt all his intentions and arrangements. He did tell them, as became an honorable and grateful man, that the friend of his father—the debtor who had gone away to Brazil with slight chance of return—had made money there, and had died, bequeathing to the son of his dearest and best friend a yearly income of three hundred pounds. And Ernest wrote befitting thanks for what Mr. Stepney had done. It might have been well if that letter could have been put before Dormer's eyes when he raged to Latrobe about ill-treatment which he conceived himself to have received.

His determination offended and grieved them both. Mr. Stepney could never be brought to understand that literature was a trade, or he would have respected it more; but this shows that he had never been fairly introduced to its mysteries. That it was a profession he utterly denied. How could there be a profession without regular education, a diploma, and a brass plate? Mrs. Stepney was better informed, but her aversion to the literary calling arose from her conviction that all secular authors were atheists, and went behind the scenes of theatres. So once more Ernest Dormer was estranged from his relatives, yet not in a way which forbade their reunion, and, as we have seen, they came forward once more to his succor and establishment in the world. There was very good stuff in these people, in spite of certain pomposity and lack of the general knowledge which makes those who have too much of it so horribly tolerant of every thing.

It was then that he took the Hut. It is not necessary for us to say more on that subject, except that he was perfectly right in believing that the story of that little household was well known to the Stepneys. There were many persons who had been offended by Ernest's withdrawal from the society in which he had lived so long, and more than one of these took the most careful pains that Mr. Dormer's relatives should know the character of their nephew.

Such is the brief story of Ernest Dormer's life, and it is told not for its own sake, but because it aids to explain the course of his feelings and of his actions at the time with which we are

immediately concerned. The first important incident in his history was the death of his father, which brought down Ernest from his natural position in the world to that which has been described. The second was the faithlessness of his one idol, his sister Rosa. These things were followed by a long and unprofitable apprenticeship to a world in which Dormer had neither business nor wish to live, and then again by a connection which reclaimed him from various kinds of irregularities, only to fix him in a position on which society looked askance, and which Ernest himself, in certain moments, felt must end in some painful manner. But for the time he accepted it, as he had done the life that preceded it, and even believed, as we have seen, that he was happy.

His misfortune, therefore, may be stated in the simplest words. Until his marriage he had never had occasion to understand the character of a high-minded and pure-hearted woman. We shall see whether any instincts of his nature supplied his want of the best knowledge that can be given to man, or acquired by him—"the knowledge that 'heals' the soul to know."

CHAPTER LII.

THE HOME BLOW.

"ANOTHER song to the same tune as the last, Francine," said the lady of Martletowers, as she read her affectionate and attached brother's note. "Read that, and tell me how I am to manage."

"I think you had best do as he bids you," said the pale Francine, after making out the note, which she did with some trouble—she read English badly—"or he will not send you the money."

"Which I must have," said Mrs. De Gully. "But how can I do it? I don't visit the Conways or the Dormers, and leaving the letter at the door will not answer his imperial majesty's purpose."

"If you want the money, all this is nothing," said Francine.

"Yes, it is something," said her patroness; "but you don't understand the usages of society here. But I should not particularly care, only I know what would happen. I should call, and ask to see Mrs. Dormer, and I should be told that she was not at home; and if I asked when I should be likely to see her, the father or mother would come out, and—no, I see the way. You shall deliver it, Francine. I will drive you into Naybury, and you shall leave me at Chervil's, and go up with the letter."

"And why should I get in if you can't?"

Mrs. De Gully looked up haughtily for a second, and something like fire came into the large soft eyes, but only to disappear after the faintest gleam, and the expression was succeeded by a laugh.

"You are so much more clever than I am, Francine," said Mrs. De Gully, lazily.

"That is not it. But I understand how. I am a servant, and there are no rules of etiquette about servants. Well, I say again, if you want the money, I will go."

"You are very good, Francine," said Julia De Gully, ironically. For she could never restrain her humor, no matter how she might be inconvenienced by showing it. "I shall be very much obliged by your delivering the letter."

"And if the money comes," replied Francine, "I too shall be very much obliged by your remembering where some of it has been due for a very long time. A poor servant requires her wages, you know."

"Francine, how often have I told you that bad temper is a sin? I am afraid you have no religion, Francine. I shall send for a clerical man to attend to you."

"How am I to get in?" was the only answer of the dogged Francine.

"Now can not your cleverness think of some way?"

"Yes, I can say that I come with your compliments and some grapes, as you heard that the lady was not well."

"As if the Conways have not better grapes than mine. Don't be so obstinate, Francine. You shall certainly have your twenty pounds out of what he sends."

"All right," said the pale companion, with a grimace intended for a smile. "No, I can manage better than that."

"No doubt. And I will not ask how you manage, because I had rather be out of the business, you understand. The letter came to you, and the delivering it was your affair."

"As if the man at the post-office would not notice that large packet directed to you," scoffed the confidante. "There is no such blunder as trying to be too clever, Madame. But I will not bring you into it. What an ugly handwriting, but good, too. And the letter smells of the chemist's shop—smell it, pray."

"Take it away. How very nasty! What extraordinary friends my fastidious Henry is taking to!"

"Are you curious? I am not, but letters come open by accident; and this one looks as if an accident had been intended, it is scarcely fastened."

"No," said Mrs. De Gully, with some energy. "I choose to know nothing but what I am told. If Henry likes to give me his confidence, well and good, but he shall do it frankly, and not hint to me that I can peep into a letter."

"That is a whim of temper, if you like," said Francine, "and one you get nothing by. If I sulked I got your promise to pay me. But you great ladies are strange things."

"Perhaps; but we *are* ladies," said Mrs. De Gully. And her look this time did not encourage Francine to retort.

They drove into Naybury, as proposed, and Francine, in her quiet dress of pearl gray, which made it difficult to decide what was her social station, asked, in Mr. Chervil's presence, per-

mission by her patroness to go and make a purchase elsewhere.

"Certainly, go. Mr. Chervil will let me sit here, I know. Did you bring money with you, or do you want some?"

"Ah, I forgot it," said Francine. "If you would lend me a sovereign."

Which Mrs. De Gully had to do, and noticed the peculiar smile with which she was thanked.

"People will be so clever," said Francine, as she went up the street. "She thought to improve the speech by offering money, and so I have got a sovereign. I like people who are too clever."

Magdalen's faithful guards were on the alert, and orders had been given that no one was to see Mrs. Dormer until Mr. or Mrs. Conway had been consulted, and the servants, supposing themselves quite to understand the reason for so much precaution, carried it out with all the important fussiness of the trusted domestic. There was not the least chance of Francine's carrying the outwork by a *coup*, as she had hoped. Anne, by right of her superior knowledge, or at least, suspicion, that something was wrong, was preternaturally ready to pounce upon a caller.

"No one could see Mrs. Dormer. But Mr. and Mrs. Conway could be seen."

"That will be better still," said Francine, adroitly accepting the situation. "And either, as may be most convenient. Please do not let them be disturbed, if engaged, as I will wait, with pleasure."

The message was so naturally given that Anne was thrown off her guard, and went back to her work for a few minutes before apprising her mistress of the visit. Francine, left in the hall, used her keen wits, and discovering that there was no one in the little parlor, entered it.

There was Mrs. Dormer in her favorite seat in the garden.

The large window was open, and Francine went up to it, attracted Magdalen's attention, and held out the letter.

Magdalen looked up wonderingly for a moment, and prepared to rise, and just then Francine heard Mrs. Conway say,

"I thought you said in the hall, Anne?"

"Yes, m'm."

"No, m'm," muttered Francine to herself. "Pray do not rise; it is of no importance," she cried to Magdalen, and dextrously jerked the letter to the very feet of the lady whose name it bore.

Then Francine turned to confront Mrs. Conway, who, missing her in the hall, sought her in the parlor.

"I beg pardon, m'm, but I understood that I was to come in here. I ventured to ask for Mrs. Dormer, but hearing that she can not be seen" (Mrs. Conway's eye on her darling all the time), "I took the liberty of asking for you or Mr. Conway."

"What did you want?" said the mother, somewhat flustered, but glad that the visitor was shut up with her there, and Magdalen safe in the garden.

"Mr. Dormer is in London, I believe?"

"I do not know. He is not here."

"I am aware of that, m'm. But could you favor me with an address which is likely to find him? I ought to explain my reason."

"Never mind your reason," exclaimed Mrs. Conway; "I don't want it. His club—the Octagon, that's the most likely. I know no other. You had better go now."

"I know what is going on," said Francine to herself, "though my back is turned to the window. The young lady has opened the letter, and it is agitating her, and the old lady wants to get to her and take it away. I won't hinder her. Mr. Henry Wigram never behaved well to me, and once he called me a coarse name. I will hurry away, else I might keep her boiling over."

She thanked Mrs. Conway with earnestness, and was gone.

Magdalen had opened the letter, which she thought might be some kind of petition from one of her poor or a piece of clerical mendicancy, of which there was much in evangelical Naybury; but some explanatory lines which Mr. Dudley had thoughtfully prefixed to the statement he inclosed, sank at once into her brain and her heart. The words told her that she was now furnished with information as to her own conduct.

The lines swam before her eyes, but she retained self-possession by an effort, and the thought crossed her that not there, not in that chair where she had read Ernest's letters, and where she had listened to his love-talk, would she read what he had now sent her.

Mrs. Conway's agitation had been caused by seeing Magdalen hurry away, with no invalid's cautious step, from her chair in the garden. Before the mother could reach her Magdalen had locked herself into the library up stairs.

"Let me in, dear," cried Mrs. Conway, knocking eagerly.

"Please leave me a few minutes, mamma. I have a letter from Ernest. I will call you when I have read it."

"A letter from Ernest," repeated her mother, "and in what a voice she says it! But she has a right to read it alone. Anne! Anne!" she called, hastily descending the stairs.

"Yes, m'm."

"Did the postman come back with a letter that he had forgotten?"

"He have not been here to-day at all, m'm."

"He must have come, for Mrs. Dormer has just had a letter from London."

"No postman brought it, m'm, that I will swear any wheres. Why, m'm, it must have been brought by that lady that was here this minute."

"Lady?—she is no lady—I know her face quite well; but she never saw Mrs. Dormer."

"I left her here, m'm, in this hall where we stand, she speaking so gentle and lady-like, and saying there was no hurry, but she would like

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to see you or master, and I only went to fetch my duster and brush out of the drawing-room, when she must have stepped into the parlor and seen Miss Magdalen in the garden. But she would never have had the impudence to call to her to come and take a letter; that can't be the way, m'm."

Another time Anne would have heard something to her advantage about a duster and brush being in a drawing-room at twelve o'clock in the day, but Mrs. Conway was too much excited to think of small offenses. She hastened to find her husband, whom she at length discovered in a distant part of the garden.

"William," she said, "why do you keep out of the way? If you had been in the house this would not have happened."

"What has happened?" he asked, too anxious to note the petulant charge.

"She has received a letter from Ernest."

"But who could prevent that? or who would wish?"

"I tell you it has been brought clandestinely, smuggled into the house by a woman—I know who it is now—it is that French maid belonging to that bad woman at Martletowers. What has she got to do with Ernest?"

"My dear Mary, quietly, one thing at a time. Do I understand you that Mrs. De Gully's maid has been here with a letter from Ernest to Magdalen?"

"Yes, and she has locked herself into the library with it. What is to be done?"

"Done?"

"Yes, of course. What underhanded proceeding is this? There must be something wrong and treacherous. The woman held me in talk, pretending to want Ernest's address, whereas her errand was to give his letter to Maggie."

"Nonsense, Mary. Does Dormer think that we should intercept his letters to his wife?—you are dreaming."

"Is it a letter only?" said Mrs. Conway, in a low tone. "Are there not some law papers that must be put into a person's hand by a witness?"

"We shall drive ourselves mad with such wild guesses," said Mr. Conway, throwing down the gardening implement with which he had been amusing himself. "Where is the child?"

"Do I not tell you, locked into the library?"

"I will speak to her."

On their way into the house another servant, Maria, came up to complete the chain of testimony. She had been at an upper window, looking at Mrs. Dormer, and thinking that she seemed better than she had lately been, when suddenly a letter came flying from the house, and lighted on the grass. The girl thought that it was some little joke of her master's, and waited to see Mrs. Dormer laugh at it, but she did not, and so Maria named it to Anne, who sent her with the report, but deemed meet to keep herself in the back-ground.

"The insolence!" said Mrs. Conway. "To dare to come into my house, and fling a letter at my child. You are a magistrate, can you do nothing to her? What is the use of the law if it can't punish outrages like that?"

"My love, it is neither of anger nor punishment that we should be thinking now. Magdalen, darling," he said, knocking at the library door. "You have some news. May we hear it?"

There was no answer.

"Break it open—not you, papa—send for Robert—tell him to bring something—Anne—Maria—where are you all?" cried Mrs. Conway.

"A moment, love."

And he knocked and spoke again, but with no better success.

"A ladder at the window, m'm, would be quicker, and would not frighten Miss Magdalen, I mean Mrs. Dormer," whispered Anne. "I would run up, and open the door to you."

It was done, and Magdalen was found on the sofa, with her head resting on a hand.

When her parents entered she gazed at them, without wonder, without speech.

The letter they could not see.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE CLUB ONCE MORE.

All the Octagon Club knew, of course, that one of its members had been personally assaulted by another, and as the details of the transaction were necessarily known only to the two parties, neither of whom was inclined to talk on the subject, discussion was confined to the moral character and social consequences of the castigation.

Mangles had felt himself bound to comply with Dormer's request that he would mention at the Octagon that he had beaten Mr. Henry Wigram, and with good cause. But he contented himself with saying this once or twice, and offered no vindication of the act.

On the whole, it was considered rather a mistake.

"Will things stop where they are?" asked Marsden. "One would not ask such a question on the Continent, but we English are the oddest mixture of fire and ice."

"I suppose it will come before the committee," said Jemmy Rydon. "What's the good of a committee, if it does not take such matters in hand?"

"Without going into that large question, Jemmy," said Mr. Milwarden, "I, as a member of the illustrious body, express my sanguine hope that we shall have nothing to say to it. It is out of our way. Your dinner bills, gentlemen, if annotated with complaints, shall receive our best attention; your excuses for not paying up your subscriptions at the proper date shall be considered with justice tempered with mercy; and any suggestions for the amelioration of the lavatories shall be heard with gravity if not gratitude. But when you come to flagellations and scandal, we must decline to exercise our functions."

"Long-winded beggar it is," said Tom Alford. "All his discourses are divided into three heads, like Cerberus. What are you laughing at? He had three heads, for I've seen the picture of him in an old Virgil—come. But as for Wigram and Dormer, the best thing they can do is to leave the club."

"Well, you know," said Rydon, "I said before, and I say again, that Launceston was hard that night on Wigram."

"Who's talking of Launceston," said Dalston, impatiently.

"Well, you were present yourself," said Rydon, "and you heard what was said, and you can contradict me if I am wrong."

"*Quis vituperavit?* my good fellow," said Milwarden, "or rather, to adapt the sentiment to your comprehension, who the devil has anything to say against Launceston?"

"Well, your Honor," said Rydon, sticking to his text, "he was at the bottom of it all."

"Stuff," said Dalston.

"It is not stuff. He worked up Henry Wigram into a rage, and made him say things that had better not have been said, and then Mr. Dormer pitches into Wigram. Now I say that the responsibility of the whole thing is with Launceston, and that it is his business to see the affair put straight."

"If we are going back like that, you great owl," said Milwarden—"but stop! perhaps you are offended at being called an owl? He was the bird of wisdom, like you; that's my reason for calling you so; but I'll withdraw owl, if you like. You don't feel offended? good. Then I proceed to say, that if we are going back like that, we shall have to inquire what right Wigram had to say any thing about a certain lady, and so we may get into a whole history of things, as to which we know nothing. I intend to decline discussing the matter any more."

"Mind you," said Rydon, "I don't believe there's a single word of truth in any thing that has been said or hinted about that lady."

"Why don't you?" asked Dalston.

"You don't," retorted Rydon.

"I know that; but your reasons are not likely to be mine, and I should be glad to have my opinion fortified by your wisdom. What's your ground of unbelief?"

"You'll all laugh at me."

"Of course we shall," said Milwarden. "I hope you have no doubt of that."

"Laugh if you like. I have seen her picture. Sam Mangles showed it to me. And, I may be an ass for saying so, but if there's any thing wrong about that woman, I'll eat my hat."

"That doesn't make me laugh, for one," said Milwarden, frankly. "I believe a great deal in faces. Only—and Jemmy mustn't be angry with me—I take it that you must know how to read a face, and that process requires sharper brains than those with which our dear old Rydon would credit himself."

"I never said I was clever," said the perfectly good-tempered Rydon.

"And I never thought so—I never even said so," replied Milwarden, without laughing, because he had made a little epigram with which he was pleased.

"Not so bad," said Mr. Mangles; "but you should not say these things before dinner. I am quite at one with you about faces; and as for the one of which you are speaking, and which, remember, I have had the pleasure of seeing in life, I confirm Rydon's views. I never saw one that so manifestly meant goodness, if you gentlemen know what that article is."

"I was not chaffing, Mangles," said Milwarden. "I look upon this whole business as a very sad one, and I am not ashamed of saying so. I am very sorry indeed for both parties."

"I hope no fellow is ashamed to say that he is sorry a good woman should get into a scrape," said Theodore Dalston; "but I haven't the least idea what the scrape is, or how the compassion should be allotted. Wigram's hints and howls convey no meaning to me, but I suppose Launceston saw one, or he would not have made the row. Will any body tell me what has happened, and who's to blame?"

"My brief is that nothing has happened, and that nobody is to blame," said Mr. Mangles.

"Your brief, yes; but your opinion?"

"About the same, except that somebody has been foolish; but you must not ask me to say who."

"Still," said Milwarden, "you rather represent Ernest Dormer here; that is to say, you bring his message, and as you just remarked, you hold a brief for him. We may look to you to keep us right."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, how shall I put it? We all—at least all here—like old Ernest immensely, and are willing to take any good about him on trust. But if you know much more than we do, and there is any thing particularly fishy, I am certain your friendship for him will not induce you to—in fact, if he has gone wrong, you'd say so."

"I have no hesitation in answering that challenge."

"It isn't a challenge," said Milwarden; "it is a compliment."

"Put it which way you like," said Mangles, "and put beside it my assurance, on my honor, that Ernest Dormer has done nothing unbecoming a gentleman."

"And I am devilish glad to hear you say so," said Dalston. "And now about the other party?"

"My solemn belief is, that I shall be able to give as satisfactory an answer."

"Then Wigram was right to a certain extent," said Dalston. "That is, he was right in making us believe that some sort of inquiry was going on. I thought that he would not speak entirely without book."

"There is an inquiry going on, and Wigram knows nothing at all about it. I dare say that some of you may be inclined to doubt this, but it is true."

"If you say so, it is," said Theodore; "and I shall follow Milwarden's advice, and drop the subject until we know more."

"And then drop it altogether, I hope," said Henry Milwarden. "But I should like to know what Wigram means to do."

"Bring an action for an assault, perhaps," said Marsden, "and ask you to lead for him."

"Well, he might do worse," said Milwarden. "But I should not advise it; a man doesn't look well who comes to complain of having been flogged for slander, especially where a woman's name is mixed up. The class from which jurors are taken is not moral—that fallacy has been exploded—but it has a great objection to people who accuse others of immorality."

"Is he to take his beating quietly, then?" asked Marsden.

"What's he to do? He can bide his time,

carry a good stick, and some day assault Dormer in return. Or he can go to Boulogne-upon-the-Sea, and invite Dormer to come over into a country where the sixth commandment is not in force, and they can try to kill one another, and if Dormer won't come (and if his life is assured, he can't, in justice to his family), Wigram can denounce him as a coward in the Boulogne *Gazette*. Can you point out any fourth scheme for redress?"

"I can," said Jemmy Rydon.

"Well, let's hear."

"What I said before. It's a business for the committee. I should think that Wigram will lay the case before them, and say that for words spoken in the smoking-room, and reported by a member, another member committed an assault, and that Ernest Dormer ought to be expelled."

"The committee has no jurisdiction in the matter, and you, Jemmy Rydon, are a larger owl than I gave you credit for being," said Milwarden.

"If I know Henry Wigram," said Dalston, "he will not let the matter rest, or, at all events, he will try for some kind of revenge."

"Revenge, my dear fellow," said the young barrister; "the word's out of use."

"The idea's not."

"But it must be. What revenge can a man have in these days? Can Wigram go and hire a couple of assassins to shoot Dormer?"

"I dare say that he can," said Dalston. "Most things are to be had in England for money. But I don't suppose he will do that."

"Can he bribe the servants of Dormer's house to poison him, as in the good old days?"

"That's all nonsense. But revenge is to be had, and Wigram is the man to have it."

"Seeing is believing. What say you, Mangles?"

"I believe in the possibility of a good deal of revenge, in the present state of society; but it requires money and perseverance, and a man who has those things is seldom fool enough to waste his time on the other. I have the means of injuring my enemies a good deal, but I never do, because it is not business."

"But you slash a great many poor fellows, editor, in a merciless manner."

"Yes, but they are the enemies of the public, not mine."

"I have noticed with regret that the *Vivisector* has lately been severe upon the gentler sex," said Milwarden.

"I assume that you mean women. Not severe, but full of kindly advice," said Mangles.

"Hang it!" said Milwarden, "kindly advisers are all very well; but I should be inclined to say with King David, let not their precious balms break my head—a course your fellows have been taking."

"I utterly deny it. Give an instance."

"What did you say about 'The Merry Wives of Windsor?'"

"I said nothing, but I remember that the play has been lately alluded to."

"Yes, pleasingly. I forget the exact words, and I dare say that I shall substitute better ones; but it was something to the effect that if Shakspeare had to write the play now, there would be no merry wives, but a couple of disreputable matrons, and Sir John Flastaff would be smiled on by each, and that the intrigue would arise out of their quarrel for his good graces, and finally, to heal scandal, it would be proposed that Anne Page should be Lady Falstaff, but the knight, with a touch of Lord Ogleby, would transfer her to Fenton, who should secretly be known to be Sir John's illegitimate son. Then, you said, the play would be acceptable to the British matron, who now calls it coarse."

"All pure invention—I use the wrong adjective," said Mr. Mangles. "But there is a good deal of truth in it, for all that. Expand the subject into an article, and I will see whether I can use it."

"And so earn five guineas in the time it takes me to master a brief marked five-and-twenty," said Milwarden. "Thanks, but I have chosen my trade."

"And this is the man who talks of virtue. I have heard him."

"I'll talk of it as much as you please, and I will practice it by doing my duty in my own sphere, Mr. Mangles. Seek not to beguile me into the paths of literature. Is there any thing new in that world?—tell me something that I can repeat to an intelligent female, for I am going out to dinner."

"I know of nothing that would bear the double filtration," said Mr. Mangles, "unless you like to tell her that a poem will shortly appear which will have a great success, and which it will be quite impossible for any woman, even in these days, to say that she has read."

"And I may add, in strict confidence, of course, that the book is by my friend the editor of the virtuous *Vivisector*."

"You can say so, if you please. If the lady believes you, her opinions must be of small value to any body, and if she does not, I dare say it will not be the first time that you have been disbelieved. Here come the valiant Walter Latrobe. You should have been here half an hour ago, Walter, and joined in the special commission on the conduct of a certain intimate friend of yours and mine; in whose affairs this club seems to take a most especial interest."

"I see no objection to that," said Walter Latrobe, "if people would talk only of what they know."

"Likely," said Dalston, laughing.

"Well, Wigram has had a little lesson upon the subject," said Latrobe, coldly.

"You don't mean that you approve Dormer's conduct in that matter? You are the last man whom one would expect to approve of violence."

"There are times," said the soldier, "when a man may be pardoned for forgetting himself, and if I have heard the story correctly, the

provocation given by Mr. Wigram was very offensive."

"But," said Dalston, "one does not help a lady's character much by beating a man who speaks of her."

"This is no case of a character that wants helping, Doddy, and that is a point which I hope all Dormer's friends will bear in mind. The character is perfect, and, therefore, Ernest Dormer can chastise impertinence without the least risk."

"That is the view you mean to maintain?"

"That is the only view which a gentleman acquainted with the facts can maintain, Dalston. You know pretty well that I am not in the habit of giving certificates of character, and to do so in this case would be in itself an insult. But I hope not to hear any body who is less informed than I am indorsing any thing which Mr. Wigram may have said."

Walter Latrobe said this without the least approach to offensiveness. It was rather in the tone of a man who asks a favor for himself. And his gentle championship had much value.

"Dormer remains in town, of course?" said Jemmy Rydon. "He must keep in the way."

"Might I ask you why he must?" asked Latrobe, mildly.

"Well, it's an odd question, isn't it? He must wait until he sees what Henry Wigram has to say to him."

"If he were in my hands, he would not wait five minutes longer than suited him. What can Mr. Wigram have to say to him? What will be said to Mr. Wigram is, that he wantonly exposed himself to castigation, and got it."

"Ah, these are not the old days," said Jemmy Rydon.

"No. I go with you as far as that," replied Walter Latrobe, smiling; "and men should not carry the coarse talk of the old days into the new ones, as there is no way of fighting themselves out of scrapes."

"Except as a certain soldier fought himself out of a scrape, to the detriment of sundry heathen," said Mangles.

"Yes; wasn't I frightened?" said Latrobe, simply. "I suppose you won't believe that I thought of this club, and the arm-chairs in the smoking-room, and what a fool I was to be in danger of being cut into pieces instead of being at my ease among you. By Jove! I thought a good many things very fast indeed on that occasion. Who's going to dine here? I must, as I am going to the theatre."

"With some children, Latrobe, come?" said Rydon.

"To meet some children," said Latrobe. "Do you think that I would go to a theatre with grown-up people? I would as soon ride with them in a merry-go-round at Greenwich Fair. Fancy an adult going to a play to please himself."

"The late Duke of Wellington, in early life," said Mangles, "was much celebrated for his skill with the then fashionable toy called a bandelorum, and is said to have played with it in places where such frivolities were scarcely expected."

"I am not the Duke of Wellington, and I am very hungry. Let us see about dinner. I sent Ernest Dormer word that I would dine here, and perhaps he will look in. I hope so."

"So do I," said Mangles.

He had made some friends, who stood by him in the hour of trouble.

CHAPTER LIV.

DORCAS AT HOME AGAIN.

By a sort of tacit understanding among the members of the Naybury Dorcas that meritorious association had met but little of late. To the one assemblage to which the president had so defiantly bidden two or three recalcitrant members, the warned individuals and a few others had come, but conversation had flagged, and the ladies were even grateful to a curate who had ventured in among them, and had earned his tea by reading aloud some missionary reports, which were affirmed by the salaried officers of the society that issued them to be in the highest degree satisfactory. Mrs. Bulliman had saved her dignity, however, and nothing was said about the proposed visitation of the Rectory of Saxbury.

Phœbe had been quite prepared to assert herself, should her visit to the Rector be mentioned. In fact, she had made up her mind for the sensation of martyrdom, and had prepared several pointed remarks which she intended to offer in self-defense, and which, though they might be conceived in a carnal spirit, were clothed in language spiritual enough to prevent her being snubbed and silenced, as a worldling like Fanny Buxton would be. On the whole, therefore, Phœbe was disappointed when the proceedings were brought to an end, and she had been afforded no opportunity of admitting that she had visited the Rectory, and had disavowed the Dorcas purpose of rebuking Mr. Grafton for not having brought up his son better. Phœbe's walk across the fields with Edward Grafton had not been marked by much that would have conveyed hope to the majority of young ladies; but she had lived in a cold atmosphere, and a little cordiality and attention went a long way with her. The behavior of the Rector and his family had excited in Phœbe's mind a grateful interest, and she would have rejoiced in the double pleasure of suffering at the hands of Dorcas and of suffering in behalf of her new ecclesiastical friends.

Upon the occasion in question, however, there was no one to raise the cry of persecution, and doom the young martyr to the lions. The attendance was small, and the members worked in silence, broken only by the curate's narratives of the success of Brother Jones and Sister Brown in inducing the natives of Ceylon to accept tracts. Then a longish interval took place, during which Dorcas did not sit. The President was a wise

woman in her way, and having vindicated her position, was not inclined to risk a second demonstration which might have been less successful. As regarded her own avowed intention of visiting Mr. Grafton, and in regard to which she had sustained so severe a conflict with that evil Mrs. De Gully, who had rather routed her than not, Mrs. Bulliman was in doubt how to proceed. It was due to herself, due to her place as leader of the religious world in Naybury, that she should redeem the promise so solemnly given to her pious parliament. As to fear, she did not know the meaning of the word; and if the Rector of Saxbury thought that his imposing elocution and awful organ would have any effect upon this excellent woman the Rector made an addition to the rather numerous mistakes of his life. Mrs. Bulliman was quite prepared to beard the lion in his den. But this lady had some very good feelings about her, and but for the necessities of her position she would have given her kindlier nature fairer play. She had managed to extort certain facts from her husband touching the Rectory. He was very secret, and, moreover, he was offended with her, and eschewed private conversation as much as a man can avoid such passages with his wedded wife; but he had jerked out some hints that it was not a time to be pestering Mr. Grafton with cant (such was the awful word used by the wretched worldling) when he was in a sea of troubles, out of which that man Abbott might or might not be able to extricate him. That man Abbott—the phrase showed that Mr. Bulliman, too, had his little spitefulnesses. He had not so completely retired from business but that he could have done the work required by Mr. Grafton without the necessity of sending for the cathedral-town lawyer. But he was in no humor to confide any annoyances to Mrs. Bulliman.

That lady had been, of course, perfectly justified, as a wife and as a mother, in saying to Mr. Bulliman that his conduct in regard to Mrs. De Gully was utterly unworthy of a gentleman and a Christian. The language was, however, rather incisive, and the respectable solicitor, when the allegation was suddenly made, was, unhappily, abandoned to himself sufficiently to demand of his pious wife what the devil she meant. And finding that this furious and unseemly question a little staggered her—for she had been accustomed to his good-natured and humble evasions of difficulties between them—the man pursued his triumph, and commanded his wife to adduce, there and then, the proofs on which she dared to bring such charges against her husband. Then Mrs. Bulliman, plucking up her usual spirits, refused to be catechised, but declared that his behavior was the talk of all Naybury. Mr. Bulliman retorted that he believed she told untruths, but that if she did not all Naybury might go where Dorcas believed that most of it would go; and they separated in wrath. Had they lived in London, or some place of freedom, Mr. Bulliman would probably have gone away to Brighton or Paris until recalled by his wife's penitence; but these things can not well be done by residents in country towns. Nevertheless they sulked, savagely, in spite of the great difficulty which two people, unless they give their best minds to the work, find in keeping up a show of animosity when they live in the same dwelling and are constantly thrown together. Unless married people have a very large house, and a double set of servants, they had much better fulfill the conjugal vow, and make up all quarrels before their ludicrous aspect sets in. But Mrs. Bulliman, on the present occasion, was really angry and very bitter. Mrs. De Gully's attentions to the solicitor had always been unwelcome to his wife; but from the time when the latter discovered that he called at Martletowers without saying any thing about it, and permitted Mrs. De Gully to use his Christian name, Mrs. Bulliman's sense of wrong became intensified to a degree that enabled her to ask her husband at dinner for mustard, and more gravy, and the liver wing (she had what she liked), and then to revert to scowl and snub. And he had been a good deal enraged at her presuming to affix an objectionable character to his professional care of a pretty and helpless woman, and, conscious of his own propriety, he was more sour to his wife than he had been since a certain time in their earlier life when she wanted him to push into the crowd around a street fight and distribute tracts.

But in spite of this uncomfortable state of things in the household, or perhaps in order to show Mr. Bulliman that his wife was not absolutely dependent upon his smiles for all her happiness, Mrs. Bulliman resolved to hold another Dorcas. It may not be right to say that she was moved to this resolution by the fact that Naybury was at this time full of rumors of a singular kind, and that the adverse prophecies which had been made in Dorcas about the marriage of Miss Conway with Mr. Dormer seemed likely to be brought to pass. Good people do not wish to talk scandal, and take no pleasure in the misfortunes of others, and there was much good in the President of Dorcas, and in many of her council. But mixed motives caused the assembling of the new meeting, and perhaps we may say, but unfairly, that Mrs. Bulliman availed herself the more readily of the occasion because her knowledge of human and Naybury nature told her that this time, at least, there was no doubt of her having a full house.

Had there been a call of the house, the attendance could not have been better. The schoolroom was found to be too small, and both the drawing-rooms were devoted to the cause of the poor and needy. Sarah Bulliman was not deceived, and well knew why her rooms were full; but she was pleased, and not displeased that Mr. Bulliman, who had not been aware of the change of scene, came into the rooms in search of something, found his ill-treated wife queening it over all the religious notables of Naybury, and retreated in some discomposure.

The tea was worthy of the occasion, Mrs.

Bulliman never giving her friends a chance of scoffing at petty economies. Then the work was duly distributed from the various bags, and nobody spoke aloud. The fact was, that there was but one subject on which all meant to have their say, but the question was how to bring it decorously under the notice of the house.

So the evening was beginning to flag, simply because no one had the key that would unlock the treasury. Girls whispered to one another, matrons sewed in silence, or compared work without much remark, and there was danger of there being no great debate after all.

But the President felt that this would not do, and that she had better not have brought them all together than have allowed them to waste time. And she cast her eye upon her child Phœbe. Now Phœbe, since her rebellion, had been rather coldly treated by her mother, though the plain language in which the plain young lady had signified her views had made Mrs. Bulliman consider that any further skirmishing might be undesirable. Moreover, she was a good mother in her way, and was inclined to rehabilitate Phœbe before Dorcas, if the maiden would be docile.

"Phœbe dear," said her mother, "you were last night reading out an interesting little paper on the Sandwich Islands. I was writing, and could not pay the attention it deserved. What did the author say about the promotion of civilization, and of something far better, by means of white settlers?"

"He said that there was still a certain prejudice against the marriage of white persons with natives, but that it was being removed, and that the best results were hoped for from such unions. My opinion may not be good for much, but I believe in nothing of the kind," added Phœbe, who was very much inclined for a round or two with somebody.

Her mother was annoyed at her tone, but said, gently enough,

"I think we at a distance should hardly pit our opinions against those of persons who have resided in the islands."

"It does not seem to me to be a question of fact, but one of feeling," said the resolute and didactic Phœbe, who was willing to fight her own lawful mother rather than not fight at all. "I do not need to go to the Sandwich Islands to learn that unequal marriages can never be happy ones."

"There is no inequality, only a difference in skin," said her sister Sophia, who saw what her mother was driving at. "In some marriages, not so far off as the favored Sandwich Islands, there are real inequalities, which produce real misery."

"Of what kind do you mean, my dear?" said another player, returning the lead—it was Mrs. Gilbert, who never emphasized, and yet could be so emphatic.

"I mean, of course, marriages in which one party is awakened, and the other remains dead in trespasses and sins."

Here the street-door slammed rather loudly, and reminded Mrs. Bulliman that this was her case.

"Yes," said Mrs. Cutcheon, who was weary of waiting and fencing, and now thought the opportunity good enough for her to come in, "there is no doubt that Sophia is right. That is a case in which we learn, on the best authority, that we can expect no happiness; and an awakened person who forms such an alliance has a burden of responsibility grievous to be borne."

And here she glanced at her hostess, which was inhospitable, the rather that Mrs. Cutcheon had taken four cups of most excellent tea at the expense of the lady she was hinting at.

"Too true," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "And even where a person is in a state which can not be called awakened, but which gives outward indications that there is a heart that may be roused to better things, it is even more dangerous to be linked to one who has neither religion nor morals."

They were getting warm, as the children say at hide-and-seek.

"In that case," said Sophia Bulliman, "it is, I suppose, nearly certain that the one who has a little good will succumb to the one who has so much of bad, and both will become castaways."

This was rather straying away from the place, and it was for the President to lead them back. Which she did, straight.

"We will hope," she said, "that in the case of a union about which we thought a good deal at the time (all know to whom I refer), the result may not be that sad one to which dear Sophia has adverted. But I fear that much which was said here, or rather in the school-room, has been—or is being—fully vindicated. I regret it, I deeply regret it."

The question was thus thrown down upon the table, and became public property.

Mrs. Cutcheon, who had of course forgiven Mrs. Conway's little victory over her and her husband in the matter of the hay, was exceedingly grieved to hear that the marriage of Miss Conway had turned out unhappily. But it was to be expected.

"I think it is very cruel and premature to say that it has turned out unhappily," said a pleasant voice, evidently pushed rather higher than usual.

"My dear Fanny Buxton," said Sophia, reprovingly.

"And my dear Sophia Bulliman," said the contumacious Fanny. "However, I am glad that it is you who speak, and not your sister, who was a bridemaid at the wedding. I am very glad that she has got nothing to say against the marriage."

"Not only have I got nothing to say against it, dear Fanny," said Phœbe, "but I feel it my duty as a Christian to remonstrate against a meeting for a holy purpose being disturbed by such discussions."

"Are you in the chair, or am I, Phœbe?" asked her mother, in tremendous displeasure, and yet privately admiring her daughter's pluck.

"You are, mamma, and I am glad of it; because I am sure you feel with me as to the impropriety of such talk."

"As I was the person interrupted, I suppose I may say something," said Mrs. Cutcheon, getting much redder than became an humble and good woman. "One young lady informs me that my language is cruel and premature, and another—not quite sure a young lady by a good many years, and therefore with less excuse—charges me with impropriety. I know what would have happened to me when I was a girl like Miss Buxton, or a middle-aged young lady like Miss Phœbe, had I ventured one of such words in the presence of my elders."

"I make no doubt that you were most carefully educated, Mrs. Cutcheon," said Phœbe, "and the results are visible to all of us in your liberality and amiability, and I did not apply the word to you in particular. But I believe that we meet to mend clothes for the poor, not to pick to pieces the characters of the rich." This was a little epigram which Phœbe had potted for a previous occasion, and which she now fired off with some enjoyment.

"I must say," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "that whatever may be thought about the propriety of taking an interest in the welfare of our neighbors—and I have yet to learn that this is improper—it is decidedly a new thing for the younger members of our association to take the direction out of the hands of the President. No one would complain—nay, every one would be thankful—if dear Mrs. Bulliman, with her age and Christian experience, should suggest that our conversation might desirably be led into more serious channels; but I do not think that the mothers of families should be reproved by young ladies of any age. As we are in Mrs. Bulliman's house, the subject is a little delicate."

"There is no delicacy on that account, Mrs. Mainwaring; and I need hardly remind my kind friends that on these evenings we know nothing of hostesses, and that it matters nothing where our little society meets, so that we meet in the spirit which is desirable. I do not agree with my Phœbe that there should be any restriction on our conversation here, and I think it may be left to the conscience of each to restrain herself from that which does not tend to edification. I am sure that nothing could be further from my Phœbe's intention than to give offense, or to seem to dictate to her elders and betters; and Miss Buxton is perfectly capable of offering her own excuses to Mrs. Cutcheon."

"I want no excuses from Miss Buxton."

"I have none to make," said Fanny, coloring very much, but holding her own, "that is, unless Mrs. Bulliman thinks that I used any unbecoming word. If any excuse is to be made, I think it should be to me, who, as you all know quite well, am very intimate with Mrs. Dormer."

"And are the first person to name your friend's name here to-night," snapped Mrs. Cutcheon.

"Is that quite just?" asked pretty Mrs. Fanshaw; "and will Mrs. Cutcheon say that any one in the room was in doubt as to the persons we were going to talk about?"

Fanny Buxton looked at her gratefully, for the little venomous taunt had for a moment discomposed the girl.

"Were going to talk about, and are, if any body wishes," said Mrs. Cutcheon. "I do not know that I am bound to be a party to any hypocritical silence on a subject which has given great offense in the place. It is all very well for young girls, and others," she added, pointedly, "to gloss over such matters in the world's way, though I should have thought that Phœbe Bulliman would have known better. But there is another view of the case. I would say that the unfortunate young lady, who must now deplore her marriage as much as we do, should feel that she has brought a scandal on religion, to which I believe she made considerable pretensions."

Fanny was going to open fire again, but a look from her grim ally, Phœbe, bade her reserve her shot.

"I agree with Mrs. Cutcheon," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "That is the point of view in which the business should be regarded, and perhaps the only one with which we, as a society, have any thing to do; though I utterly repudiate Miss Phœbe's dictation. Mrs. Dormer was—I don't use the word unkindly—rather ostentatious in her doings among the poor, for instance, and declined being put into co-operation with others, or to accept the guidance of a clergyman; and that kind of self-will appears to have been sorely rebuked."

"Without offense to Miss Buxton, I should like to ask whether any body knows where Mr. Dormer is?" said Mrs. Gilbert.

"Mr. Dormer is in London," said Fanny.

"London is a large place, my dear," replied Mrs. Gilbert, with one of her unanswerable propositions.

"I have never been there," said Fanny, finding an answer, however.

"No, dear," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "we make all allowance for your inexperience, as I am sure you must feel."

"It is possible," said Phœbe, "for a person not to have visited the metropolis, and yet to be aware of the duties of friendship. Were I as intimate with Mrs. Dormer as dear Fanny is, I should not think that I required any excuse for defending her against injustice, especially when we have nothing but provincial scandal to go upon."

"Provincial!" said Mrs. Mainwaring. "Truly, Miss Phœbe, you did not spend a fortnight in London one September for nothing!"

"I hope that I profited by that visit, Mrs. Mainwaring. I had the privilege of hearing sermons from several eminent laborers in the vineyard, and one of them addressed himself to an exposition of the ninth Commandment."

This downright blow, administered by Phœbe with so much pleasure that her face quite lighted up, so enraged Mrs. Mainwaring that she hastily bundled a heap of infant garments into her bag, and gave other signs that she was going away. Again it became the President's turn to speak.

"I would ask you, as a favor to myself, not to withdraw, Mrs. Mainwaring."

"I will stay, if you wish it, as insults are good for a proud spirit; and mine was, perhaps, a little inclined to rebel," said Mrs. Mainwaring, white with anger.

"We are not to consider plain speaking an insult, if it be conscientious," said the President, unable to refrain from taking the part of her courageous daughter. "Although Phœbe is my child, it would not become me to require her to be silent if she has convictions. But when she says that we have nothing but provincial scandal to guide us in forming an opinion on a certain subject, I must remind her that no person in Naybury can have any doubt that the marriage, at which she assisted, has proved an unhappy one. If I have held my tongue on details that have reached me, it has only been because it did not appear necessary to touch on them. But a very sad story is in circulation, and what we see lends confirmation to it."

"I should think so," said Mrs. Cutcheon.

"Every body looks at me," said Fanny, again blushing; "but I did not mean to say any thing more at present. All I have to say is, that the story about Mr. Dormer's staying away, and not being on good terms with Magdalen, is entire nonsense; they are in constant communication; he is in town on important business, being on the committee of the Octagon Club. But this very day he sent her a very long letter; and I learn this from Mrs. Conway herself."

"You called there, perhaps?" said Mrs. Gilbert, gently.

"I did, Mrs. Gilbert."

"And Mrs. Dormer was at home, and you did not see your intimate friend?"

"No, she was lying down."

"Quite natural, Mrs. Gilbert," said pretty Mrs. Fanshaw, with one of those looks which constitute the female telegraph.

"No doubt," said Mrs. Gilbert. "I have called several times, and at various hours, and I have never been allowed to see the young lady."

"I do not visit the Conways," said Mrs. Cutcheon; "but I have reason to know that no person sees Mrs. Dormer except members of her own family."

"I beg your pardon," said Fanny, "I see her whenever I call; to-day was the exception; and I had a very long talk with her a few days ago. I can not understand why some people are anxious to make a mystery where there is none."

"After this repeated defiance," said Sophia Bulliman, growing red, and becoming much uglier than her sister Phœbe, who usually was uglier than Sophia, "after this determination on Fanny's part and my sister's that nothing shall be said against their favorite, I really will not be restrained from saying that if mamma puts up with this dictation, I will not."

"Sophia!" said Mrs. Bulliman.

"Yes, mamma, I know; but I have a right to the same freedom of speech as my sister, whom you have defended two or three times this evening in a way which has surprised me. I am sure that, though I never did any thing to offend you in my life, you never stood up for me as you have done for Phœbe."

"Why," said Mrs. Fanshaw, smiling, "here is the prodigal daughter's elder sister remonstrating with the parent against extraordinary kindness to the naughty one."

"I am not going to be put down by a joke, Mrs. Fanshaw, and perhaps it is not altogether right to parody a parable. I mean to tell Fanny, and Phœbe also, though they both know it quite well, that there are other rumors in Naybury besides those which affect *Mr.* Dormer. What is the use of pretending ignorance of that, Phœbe?"

"Dear Sophia, I pretend nothing. I believe that there are some stories of a ridiculous kind, and that when they come to be sifted they will turn out as absurd as that which Fanny has just crushed."

"I hope so, I am sure," said Sophia, but not in the tone in which hopefulness is usually indicated.

"As to the story which Miss Buxton is said to have crushed," said Mrs. Cutcheon, "I can perhaps say something which I should have kept to myself if there had not been such an attempt to prevent free speaking on a matter on which we have all a right to speak. It is perfectly true that Mrs. Dormer had a long letter to-day from her precious husband."

"A lady's word," said Fanny, in a low voice.

"But does Miss Buxton know how that letter arrived?"

"How do London letters arrive generally?" laughed Fanny. "By the post, I suppose."

"Of course you do. But when a young lady takes a whole party of her elders to task, and charges them with ignorance, don't you think it would be quite as well if she took care to be well informed herself?"

Matron and maidens listened, for Mrs. Cutcheon, though any thing but popular, had one gift which commands popular attention. She had a way of finding out the smallest details of a story, and a knack of serving them up with effect. It was she, it will be remembered, who first proclaimed as certain the arrangement that the Dormers were to reside with the Conways. It was she who learned that the bedroom was to be called the Dormertory. So when she implied that she had news, all Dorcas lent her an ear; Phœbe, however, scowling frightfully, and Fanny's pretty lips working with anger.

"The letter, as Miss Buxton calls it," continued Mrs. Cutcheon, "was not brought by the postman at all, for I took in our letters, being

in the garden, and the man expressly told me that he was not going up the hill, which he must have done if he had any thing for that house. But more than this—and when Miss Buxton has heard me she will perhaps not be in such a hurry to use disrespectful language—that letter was delivered to Mrs. Dormer by a special agent of her husband's, who had to get at her by a roundabout device."

"Ah! we now see why nobody was ever admitted," said Mrs. Mainwaring.

"Yes; for though Mr. Dormer was not likely to send letters by any body here, a stranger might have slipped in. And now, Miss Buxton, did your friend Mrs. Conway tell you this, as well as what you have repeated to us, and which is worse than a falsehood, because it is a studied equivocation? Did she tell you that the letter, as you call it, was a document from the Divorce Court, to which Mr. Dormer has appealed against his wife? And did she tell you that as Mrs. Dormer kept out of the way, of course expecting something of the kind, the agent or messenger got hold of the gardener, who was nailing the vine up near the library window, and bribed him to give the packet to the lady, who was inside, and that accordingly he climbed up his ladder and handed it to your friend, who had the grace to faint away, and the door had to be broken open? Now, Miss Buxton, inquire into the truth of what I have been telling you before you accuse your betters of saying what they ought not to say."

The sensation was complete. The honors of the evening were Mrs. Cutcheon's. But Mrs. Bulliman, such is our imperfect nature, was not superior to the weakness of allowing it to be supposed that she had been aware of the nature of the revelation, and had, as they must have seen, led up to it once or twice.

"If any body else but Mrs. Cutcheon had told this," said Mrs. Fanshaw to Fanny Buxton as they went away together, "I would have disbelieved it. But the old—I don't care, I will say it—the old hag does manage to rout out the strangest things."

"Don't believe it, dear Mrs. Fanshaw, don't believe it," said Fanny, crying. "My own Magdalen in the Divorce Court! The idea is too wicked."

CHAPTER LV.

ONE LINE.

She knew it all now.

The blow had fallen, and for the moment it had crushed and stunned. As has been said, when Magdalen's parents made their way to her they found her scared and silent.

But it was not in her nature to surrender to despair, to lie down and moan away her life. Her high courage stood her friend, and a true and noble pride sustained her in that hour of bitter trial.

Their affectionate ministration was soon rewarded by Magdalen's regaining composure, and they wondered at the rapidity with which she passed from the state of torpor in which they found her to the apparent recovery of her usual sweet self-possession and quick intelligence. The wonder was not unmixed with disquiet, especially on the part of the mother.

"I must have perplexed you sadly, dears," she said. "You thought I had fainted; but I had not. I saw Anne come in at the window and open the door to you."

"Never mind, darling," said her mother, caressing her. "It is enough for us that you are safe and well. Now you must be an obedient child, and come to your room and rest."

"There is no need, dear."

"Please be obedient, Maggie."

"I am not very disobedient, mamma, am I?" she said, placing her hand in her mother's. "I know what you mean. You think that I have had painful news, and that I am going to be ill. It is not so, mamma."

"But you do not say, darling, that you have not had painful news," said her father, in spite of a deprecating look from his wife.

"I have had news which, please, you must let me think about before I say any thing to either of you," said Magdalen, earnestly. "Do not be afraid to trust me with myself. See, I am quite recovered," she added, rising, and kissing her father, but without relinquishing her mother's hand.

"You know best, Mary," said Mr. Conway, doubtfully. "At least let me say a word to you in the next room."

"Go with him, mamma."

"I will not bear this—I can not," said Mr. Conway, in a low tone, but almost fiercely, as he went out with his wife, and they passed into the nearest room. "We ought to know at once what that man has said to the child. It must be some strange and wicked thing that could work in this way upon her. I will know."

Never in their lives had Mary Conway heard her husband speak thus; and but for the greater trouble, the loving woman would have felt that harsh tone in her very heart. But she answered very gently:

"Leave her to me, love. I think she wishes to tell me all."

"She must—or he shall!"

"She has asked for a little time for thought. That is not unreasonable, dear William. It is but a few minutes since we hardly knew whether she was alive or dead. For God's sake, be thankful that she is restored, and do not be violent or hasty."

"Get the letter from her, Mary, and then do not leave her for a moment."

"I will do what I can," said Mrs. Conway. "Stay in the house."

"Why should I leave it?"

"You know why I say that," she said, taking from his hand a card which he had snatched from the table. It was the list of trains.

"I will not leave the house until I have seen

you again," said Mr. Conway. "Go back to her, and get that cursed letter." And he left her.

"You have not sent papa for Mr. Beccles, I hope?" said Magdalen, when her mother re-entered. "Indeed I do not need it."

"No, dearest."

"And you are going to let me be alone for a little, are you not, dear?"

"Magdalen, best one, you shall have your own way; you always have when those who love you beyond all else in the world can give it you. But should you estrange them from you in the hour of your trouble?—and you are in deep trouble, very deep—you can not hide that from a mother. Are we not to be trusted with your affliction as well as with your joy, my own Maggie?"

"Mamma, how I love you! But leave me to myself for a little while. Not to myself, dearest. You know with whom I mean!"

Mrs. Conway did know. She folded her child in a long and passionate embrace, and withdrew.

When Magdalen arose from her knees it would have been worth many hours of a painter's life to have learned the look which she had gained in prayer.

Then she sent for her mother, and that anxious watcher was soon by the side of her child.

"Mamma," she said, "I am in a great doubt, and while that lasts I must not tell, even to you, what has come to me to-day. Will not you and papa be content to trust me for a little while, after trusting me all my life? And will you not believe that to have a secret from you is a sorrowful thing indeed for me?"

"Love, you have taken better counsel than that of the fondest parent, and when I hear you speak so I ought to say no more. But remember this—you are very young, you have not had that fight in the world which we have had, and you know little of its hard ways, and how to meet it. You may be doing yourself and all of us a wrong in not asking for our loving advice, and letting us know whether we can help you."

"I have thought of that, mamma."

"Then I must be silent."

"No, you must not be silent, darling," said Magdalen, flinging her arms round her mother; "you must not be silent. You must stay with me, and tell me that you forgive me for perplexing you, and for much more that I have seen, but have never spoken of, because I hoped that happiness would come, and all be forgotten."

"Would come, my darling?" said her mother, unable to restrain the fast-flowing tears. "Has it gone?"

And the mother's heart paused, and she held her breath for the reply.

"For a little time, dearest," said Magdalen, in a low voice; "only for a little time."

"Then he has been the—"

"Not a word of him, mamma," said Magdalen, earnestly. "Not a word which his wife should not hear."

Mrs. Conway was a good woman, yes, in the full meaning of two simple words which mean the highest praise that can be given on earth; and with one strong effort she crushed all that was rising in her heart, and, mastering her voice, she said:

"If he deserves your love, darling, he must show it soon."

"Yes," said Magdalen, promptly.

Her mother gazed at her for a few moments, and then said:

"I need not tell you, love, that papa desired to see the letter that you have had to-day. Your answer to me must be mine to him."

"Will you tell him that indeed I have not had a letter? I thought it was one, and I thought it was from Ernest. It is neither. But it is something which I ask leave to keep to myself until I know more."

"Then you have not heard at all from Ernest, my child?"

"No—not since I told you."

"It will comfort papa if I go and tell him that," said Mrs. Conway.

Again alone, Magdalen sat face to face with her sorrow, and it needed all her bravery to confront that grim presence.

Strangely (as some might say) the fearful charges implied in the documents she had received were not the ideas that presented themselves most terribly to her. They were so wild, so dark, that she turned from them with a sensation that was as much wonder as abhorrence. They seemed like accusations prompted by some lunacy, and she seemed to close her ears against their impurity as she would have done had some insane person broken upon her with a torrent of blasphemy.

But he who had devised the message well knew how to insure its being read. He had begun with a few words which burned into her eyes and heart. He had set out that here was the business into which Ernest Dormer was inquiring, and which, for the sake of himself and his wife, ought at once to be set at rest.

That was the device which had caused her eager perusal of every line; and but for that, as the writer had foreseen, his accusations would have been wasted paper.

But Ernest Dormer was investigating this foul story in London instead of hastening to his wife.

It was false. He was not. He had many enemies, earned for him by his talents and success. One of them was lying to her.

But the flush which this angry and welcome thought brought to her brow died out as she recalled that last interview.

Yes, it was in reference to the Percy Vaughan named in the document, to the chamber, to the locket of which she had told Ernest, and of which she had made mention in her girlish diary—instantly produced to him, and offered to him that he might read all—it was in reference to all this that Ernest had come down to see her for a moment, had met her hurriedly, cold-

ly, and, after brief questioning, had hastened from her presence.

He, her husband—he whom she loved—he to whom she was soon—

It was then that she had felt the full force of the blow, and it was then that she had passed from consciousness into the state in which she had been found.

Now, somewhat strengthened, and with returning courage, she sought to look more calmly at the hideous charges.

From memory only, for she could not, as yet at least, bear to peruse again the words which had scared her.

But it was in vain that she tried to think of them. The thought of Ernest Dormer, and his daring to give an ear to an accusation against *her*, came ever between her and the wild story she had read. Did he really know what cruel wickedness was in hand? and could he, knowing that, have the heart to be any where but beside her, to protect her, and to defy her slanderers?

And did he know that she had been furnished with the frightful detail? Had he connived at its being sent to her? Had he sent it?

But this last thought was too dreadful to be borne. It passed. She even reproached herself with having allowed it, even for a moment, to cross her mind. He who had never, save once, been aught in her presence but tenderness and gentleness since they had stood at the altar—he, in the hour when she was hungering for his presence, and when his best devotion should have been hers—to strike the cruelest blow ever given to a loving woman! The thought came. Such thoughts will come, but Magdalen remembered the divine allegory. When the foul birds came down upon the sacrifice Abraham drove them away. The sacrifice was unpolluted. And she felt that she had done her husband no wrong, for the thought had never been hers.

Enough, and far more than enough, was left. Ernest Dormer was away, his letters were brief and cold, and he had seen her only to demand a mysterious explanation.

Brooding over all this produced the natural and inevitable bewilderment which the helpless feel when they must bear in silence the ever-recurring and persecuting grief. She would have given much to dare to sleep. She felt that she could have slept. But she did not dare the waking that would bring her back, perhaps from the bosom of Ernest, to the frightful presence of her sorrow.

She must do something, or she could not bear this existence. She would write to Ernest. A woman's pride should give way to a wife's love; and she felt a singular and gentle pleasure in appealing to him for protection. To whom else should she appeal? And she thought that if his heart would ever awaken for her it would be when she piteously asked for succor. And Magdalen, with a sigh that did not mean utter misery, sat down to write to her husband.

It may be that had she been stronger and firmer she would have written an humbler and more touching letter than she did. But the shock had told, and, as we have said, a certain bewilderment had succeeded to her first sorrow Words would not come to her at her will. She began two or three times, and then was half alarmed at the incoherency of her sentences.

At length a thought struck her, and she resolved on what she would do.

She withdrew the hateful packet from the hiding-place into which the poor child had thrust it, half unconsciously, and without reading it again—nay, as far as she could, averting her eyes from the bold handwriting—she inclosed it in a cover, and inside she wrote these words:

"*This was given to your wife by Mrs. De Gully's maid. Love.*"

That last word, perhaps, was not written without an effort. Ought she to say it? Did he deserve it? How would it be taken? But when do reasons against generosity weigh with a loving woman? Yet she found herself an excuse.

"No letter has ever passed between us without that word. I will not be the first to leave it out."

And then she owned that her excuse was hypocrisy, and that she would equally have put in the word had he omitted it a score of times.

"I have a letter to post, mamma, which I should like to post with my own hand. Will you walk down with me?"

"I will go with you, dear child," said her father. "But are you sure that you have strength enough?"

"For that little walk? Oh yes, and much more."

As Mr. Conway saw the carefully secured packet given to the postmaster he felt that a document which he ought to have read was being sent away; but he had made up his mind what to do, and was silent.

"The letter was, of course, to her husband," said Mrs. Conway to him when they returned, and Magdalen had gone to her room.

"Yes. She made no secret of it; in fact, held it so that I could not help seeing the direction. To his club; that is the address which he gives his wife," said Mr. Conway, angrily.

"I do not wish to make excuses for him, William; but it may be the safest address if he sleeps in the country, as he said he liked to do; and he has probably told Magdalen exactly where he is."

"I believe nothing of the kind; but I shall know all about it to-morrow."

"You have not written?"

"If I had how could I get an answer to-morrow?" said Mr. Conway, with more temper than he was in the habit of showing. "I am going to town by an early train."

"To see whom, dear?"

"To see Mr. Ernest Dormer, and to know either the day on which he means to return home, or—no matter, that is the first question. When I have his answer to that I shall know what to say next."

"I am glad that you sleep on this resolution, William."

"That will make no difference. You are strangely lukewarm in this matter, Mary."

"I lukewarm, William!" said Mrs. Conway, her eyes filling with tears; "you should not say such a thing to me; though I know that you don't mean it."

"No; no, Mary," said her husband, angry with himself, and her, and all the world; "I don't mean it—at least in the sense of wishing to vex you. You can't need to be told that. But you enjoin our compliance with all the child's notions, though she is as unworldly as she was ten years ago; and you seem to forget that her separation from her husband is a solemn and sad thing."

"For that reason, dear William, I would do nothing to bring it on."

"Bring it on! why, it has come. He has left her, and she is breaking her heart. The paper which came to-day is not a letter—certainly not; he does not condescend to write to her. It is some sort of lawyer's proposal for terms."

"William, when I threw out that idea in the midst of my anger and grief at her getting the letter you called it a wild guess."

"I was wrong, and your instinct hit on the truth."

"But now I do not believe that it was so."

"Why not?"

"I believe that she would have given me that. There would have been no place for doubt, no wish for time, after my child had received such a proposal. Her pride would have shown itself, and we should have been consulted."

"I am not so sure. Between her infatuation for him and her religious views—I wish to Heaven she had never seen those Papists!—I feel that between those two influences there is no knowing how her pride might have gone. But, Mary—I suppose I may say it—she may have more confidences for you than she has for me. I do not urge that this is not right and natural, but you should not allow me to act in the dark."

"I am asking you not to act at all," said Mrs. Conway.

"Then you mean that you know something which I am not to know."

"Do not speak in that unkind tone, William. Have we any object but one in the world, and are we not both equally set upon it?"

"But—I don't mean any thing unkind—you are evading my question, Mary," said Mr. Conway, looking hard at his wife. "You know best whether you and Magdalen should have secrets from me," he added, in a hurt tone.

"I have never known you so unjust and unkind since we married, William," said his wife. "What question have you ever asked either of us which has not been answered? I tell you every thing; sometimes, perhaps, things not worth your knowing. If ever I have kept any thing back it has been that you might not be disturbed."

"Mary, we have lived in love together so long that this sort of talk grates upon my heart more painfully than I can tell you. It would seem as if this unhappy marriage is to bring trouble upon all of us; but if so, it must be faced. It is the hardest day of my life when I have to ask my wife to speak, when she desires not to speak, and yet I feel that I must do it. You know the reasons which are prompting Ernest Dormer to ill-treat Magdalen?"

"Not in the least, William, as I am your own faithful wife."

"Then why evade my question?"

"Because there is a circumstance in Magdalen's life of which you were not told at the time, and which there has been no reason to speak of since; and I should be telling an untruth if I said that she had not given me a confidence which you had not shared. But it had nothing to do with the present unhappiness."

"Come, Mary, admit that I have the utmost confidence in your judgment when I say, that if you believe what you have last said, I do not desire to hear what has been withheld from me. I may suppose the same offer was made to her which was rejected. I do not know why I was not to be trusted—but let that pass."

"You mean by your silence, dear, that you do not wish to know?"

"I wish you to speak or not, just as pleases you," said Mr. Conway. The words were those of perfect courtesy, but there was temper in the tone.

"Have I quite deserved, William, that you should ever speak to me like that?"

"Like what? No, I beg your pardon—there—I am an ungrateful brute; you deserve nothing but—but what I think you usually receive from me," said Mr. Conway, conquering his inclination to feel wronged; "but I have been so thrown off my balance by what we have been suffering that I even forget what is due to you. I am an ungrateful brute nevertheless."

"You are nothing of the kind, dear; and if this state of things did not upset you I should think you loved our darling less than she deserves. Now you will hear patiently what I have to say?"

"Say nothing that you would not have said but for my petulance."

"Well, I might not have told you at this time, but some other, when we were in a different mood. But the only secret which Maggie and I have ever kept from you was about a great danger which she incurred when in Wales, and how she was delivered from it, and how the person who behaved so well on that occasion afterward behaved worse. It is a long time ago now, but you shall not say that we have mysteries."

Then Mrs. Conway in a few words told her husband the story of the Welsh rescue by Percy Vaughan.

He listened with close attention and with visible agitation while his wife was detailing the peril of Magdalen, and with strong excite-

ment as she described the gallantry of her deliverer.

"I was never told this—why?" he asked. "Mind, I am not offended; you had a good reason."

"We thought so. You were in delicate health, and you do not need to be told how you were wrapped up in Magdalen. I am not sure that it was right to keep it from you, but I am sure that you will believe I had but one motive."

"And," continued Mr. Conway, without answer to this, "the young man Vaughan thought that the service enabled him to propose to marry her?"

"Yes."

"I wish to God that she had accepted him!"

"What! and you say this, knowing nothing about him?"

"I know only what you tell me, namely, that he did something for which I would have cut off my own hand and given it to him if he had asked me. What a contrast between a noble fellow like that, and a man who repays the gift of the best girl in the world by—"

"William, hasty words were on my own tongue in regard to our child's husband, when she begged me to say nothing that a wife should not hear. It may be that we shall rejoice not to have spoken against him."

"It may be," said Mr. Conway, slowly. "But to return for a moment—why was this brave young fellow unacceptable?"

"I can not say; but the moment Magdalen saw in what way he was disposed to reward himself, she acted admirably, and there was an end."

"Of course she did. But do you not see in what a false position I have been placed? It was for me to have thanked that man, to have done any thing for him which I could in return for such a priceless service. I have been wronged in this matter," said Mr. Conway, gradually lashing himself into anger.

"I would rather bear your unkindness now, William, than have risked the telling you at the time."

"He must think me a cold-hearted, selfish wretch."

"He did not know of your existence. He had no opportunity of making any inquiries. The rescue occurred one week—before the next was out he had made his intentions clear, and had been dismissed. And he was most splendidly rewarded by Mr. Haslop."

"I thank him for doing my work, and not any body who took it out of my hands."

"Please hear me out, William. The young man turned out to be a very unworthy character—he committed some crime—and Mr. Haslop gave him the means of leaving the country forever."

Mr. Conway felt somewhat ashamed of the tone he had been using, but endeavored to help himself.

"Another story, then, which was also kept from me; and Mr. Haslop was told, of course, not to mention it in his letters."

"We were talking about Magdalen, dear," said Mrs. Conway, gently.

But he was not ready to be brought back. In fact, he was more offended than he had chosen to say. For the reason which had been given for his not having been informed of the incident in Magdalen's history struck at his self-love, and implied that his intellect, of which he was not perhaps unduly proud, had been regarded by his wife as not powerful enough to sustain him during physical prostration. This was a very bitter thought for Mr. Conway, and even at this time, when a much graver matter was in hand, and although his wife had pleaded her own affection for him as an excuse for the secrecy, he permitted the shaft to rankle.

"I thought that we were talking about her still," said Mr. Conway. "Poor thing! she has been unfortunate in her lovers."

"Let us pray that the future may be happy."

"There is no chance of that, unless we employ some means to set things right," retorted Mr. Conway.

"Only let us be sure that they are the right means."

"I must consider that question for myself," he replied. "It appears to be my turn now to think separately."

"If you please, William; for I am sure you will act wisely."

He crossed the room and kissed her.

"Mary," he said, in his old kind voice, "you are as much too good for me as she is for him—well, I will not say it, as you ask me to hold my judgment. We have been nearer a quarrel to-day than we have ever been in our lives."

"We have not, dear, been near a quarrel. I thought that you knew me well enough by this time to be sure of that."

"I have been in a vile temper."

"You have shown—if any thing could surprise me that is good in you—I could say that you have surprised me by your kindness in so readily forgiving what many men would not have pardoned so quickly."

"Ought not, perhaps," he said, but not in irritation.

"I will not say that; but a wife has no right, even with the best intentions, and you know mine were those, to keep any thing of importance back from her husband. Now that I have told you, it seems wonderful to me how I could have kept it back so long; but if you will believe me, dear, I had determined to forget it, and had managed not to think of it often. Only your asking a point-blank question brought it suddenly back."

"And you have not told me because you thought that there was a chance of my hearing it in another way?"

He pressed his hand on her shoulder as he spoke to show her that he did not mean this for an unworthy taunt. Yet he meant, perhaps, something of what the words implied. It was his nature.

"No, I do not think so," said his wife, quietly.

"Nor do I," said Mr. Conway. "I am sorry," he added, after a pause, "that a man who could do a manly thing, as this Vaughan could, had no more ballast about him. Do you know what was the crime he committed?"

"Not exactly, for Mr. Haslop never mentioned it again; I believe, however, that it was some kind of law-forgery."

"What can you mean, dear? Heaven forgive me for having a moment's mood to laugh!"

"That is wrong, William. We should all go mad if Heaven gave us no moments for breathing amidst our troubles. If you have never felt that there was a kind Providence visibly helping you, dear, you have never known what it is to laugh outright between sorrows. I hope you will never have the lesson that way. Oh, what would I give to hear *her* laugh! Do you not miss that music, William?"

"Do I not? But I will know what has stopped it."

CHAPTER LVI.

AN OLD LOVER, AND HIS LOVE.

For some days after her receiving the packet from Dudley Magdalen Dormer remained in the state of bewilderment which it had produced. Her mental sensations during this period were so monotonous as to suggest to her a kind of mechanical recurrence, upon which she could almost calculate. Strange changes, an unkind husband, a lonely and miserable future, were the prominent ideas which succeeded to one another with tormenting regularity, and their incessant presentment began at length to dull the brain of the sufferer. The only times at which she was conscious of excitement were at the hours when letters arrived, and when she looked for an answer from Ernest—and none came.

Her parents watched her tenderly as was their wont, but deemed it best to exercise no kind of control over her movements. There was, indeed, nothing in her manner or conversation to justify their interference, or, indeed, to cause them more unhappiness than proceeded from the fact that she was neglected by her husband, and was unhappy. And they silently obeyed her desire that as yet she should be spared all question as to the contents of the document which they knew her to have sent away. But each day they came to a resolution that this reticence must not last, and when almost bent upon requiring explanations from their child they were stayed by the gentle firmness with which she entreated their forbearance.

She was to endure more before her lips were unsealed.

"I will visit my poor people again," she said to herself one morning. "My griefs do not excuse my forgetting theirs; and it may be for the last time."

"I will go with you," said her father, when she mentioned her intention.

"Come and meet me, and walk home with me, papa," had been her answer, and she had gone away alone.

But she did little visiting that day.

As she approached the cottages of her pensioners she saw Edward Grafton coming out of the house of Mrs. Faunt.

He was flushed and angry. What had passed between the evil old woman and himself matters little. Her venomous tongue had been in full play, and she had succeeded in wounding him so severely that, utterly beaten in the conflict with her, he was exactly in a temper to revenge himself on a weaker antagonist. Edward Grafton's ill-balanced nature was more than ever out of order that day.

He saw Magdalen, and at first determined to avoid her, for he was conscious that he was not likely to prove an agreeable companion. Then the scene brought back to him an interview which will be remembered, and in which the proud and happy Magdalen, with her marriage in view, had rebuked him for a well-meant warning, and had treated him with scorn. He had sought to forgive this, and had humbled himself to ask leave to assist at the wedding, where Ernest Dormer, in the flush of his happiness, could afford to speak courteously to the rejected lover, though aware of the ill-report which Edward had brought from London, and of the violent remonstrance which he had made with Magdalen. Ernest's serene and lofty composure came back in that hour of anger to the mind of Edward, and aided to sting him. Lastly, he recollected that he had heard strange things of Magdalen, and that he had taken pains to prevent their being circulated. All these things, to a man with his passion in hand, would have been reasons why Edward should have carried out his first intention, and have retreated toward Saxbury, but as it was they acted the other way. But, to do him justice, he had not any intention of saying aught that could offend Mrs. Dormer. He merely chose to speak to her.

At the door of Mrs. Faunt's cottage, therefore, the Reverend Edward Grafton waited Magdalen's approach. He determined that at least she should pay no visit to the malicious and mocking hag, as he called her between his teeth.

Mrs. Dormer shook hands with him, and after a few ordinary words would have passed on.

"I am on my little round," she said.

"I would omit the inhabitant of this den, Mrs. Dormer," he answered. "She happens to be in no state for conversation with a decent person."

Magdalen, of course interpreting the words to mean that the woman was intoxicated, thanked him for telling her.

"Then I will go on to Mrs. Jull's."

"Thank you, parson," said a voice from the little window. "Who pays you to come into another parish and slander the poor?"

"You hear the old wretch," said Edward Grafton. "I would advise you to walk on, for she is capable of using the worst of language,

and there is no protection against a vile woman's tongue."

"I have never given Mrs. Faunt cause to be rude to me," said Magdalen, "but she seems to be excited. At all events, I will go first to Jull's."

But when Mrs. Faunt, who had been watching, saw them move away together, she dashed forth with the alacrity of the spider, to which she has previously been likened. She was near them in a moment, and she did not forget to courtesy to the lady.

"You never gave me cause, m'm, and I'm sure that I never was or could be rude to you; and you can judge for yourself, if you will condescend to take notice, whether I am in the least what that gentleman says. Why he should wish to interfere, and prevent any kindness you intended me, I am not able to say."

Charity Faunt spoke these words with perfect propriety and respect. Her sudden decorum, which seemed likely to produce its effect on Mrs. Dormer, added to Edward Grafton's anger. And was Magdalen going to take the hag's word against his, a clergyman's?

"The less Mrs. Dormer has to say to persons of your class the better," said Edward, haughtily.

"I am sure, Sir, that you know best, and are quite fit to instruct a Christian lady in her duties to her inferiors."

"I will go on to Mrs. Jull's," said Magdalen, with dignity, "and I will see you afterward, Mrs. Faunt."

"Come when you will, m'm," said the woman, respectfully; "you will be honored by me, and will find nothing to make you sorry you have done a kindness to a poor creature."

"To a brazen hypocrite," said Edward, utterly losing all temper. "It is kindness thrown away, and you are contaminated, Mrs. Dormer, by exchanging words with that person."

"That is not in my creed," said Magdalen, with the slightest attempt at a conciliatory smile, which ought to have softened Edward's heart, especially as he could not fail to see the effort with which Mrs. Dormer spoke.

"Perhaps not," he replied; "but pardon my saying that there is such a thing as unwisely setting at defiance the opinions of our neighbors."

Acquit Edward Grafton of the cruelty of having intended any second meaning in these words. They were only the awkward utterances of an angry man, who was being opposed in the presence of a person whom he hated and despised. But Magdalen crimsoned to the very brow.

If there was any latent good in the deep and dark abyss of that bad old woman's heart it came out then; not, of course, in any decent and womanly speech, but in fierce onslaught.

"Never blush like that, m'm, beautiful as your color is. To stand there and be lectured by a creature like that, who can't even stand his ground before an old woman, and whom I had just ordered out of my house! He dare to tell you what you should or should not do! He talk of contamination—as if an angel could be contaminated! It is he who ought to be on his knees before you, praying pardon for words spoken by him on this very spot. You will listen to his lectures again, m'm, I dare say, when I tell you that it was here, m'm—here, and in that cottage—that Mr. Edward Grafton hired a person to go to London, before you was married, and see what scandals could be raked up against the character of Mr. Dormer."

Magdalen simply raised her eyes to the face of Edward Grafton. Simple girl as she was, there was no mistaking the expression in his face, where rage was struggling with discomfiture.

"You can not for a moment believe this hag?" he stammered out.

Magdalen was silent. The scorn that would have looked out at her eyes, had she been what she was when they had angry speech there in the olden days, did not awake now. In truth, she had little power, as she thought, of ever being shocked again. But she was to be undeceived.

"Hag is an ugly word, but I have been told it meant a woman who raised a devil. I think I have done that. Look at him, m'm, as a sight."

"I must not hear this," said Magdalen, in a low voice, turning away.

"If you staid till midnight, m'm—and your presence would be a glory and a blessing—you would never see him muster pluck to deny what I have told you. He gave a person ten golden sovereigns, in Saxbury church, one night after service, to go to London. I know the story of the golden sovereigns has come to you, m'm, for your respected mother has been curious to know what they meant. You can tell her that they were given in darkness by a parson to buy false witness against her child's husband."

"False witness!" murmured Magdalen.

"No!" cried Edward, losing all command over himself, and speaking with vulgar loudness, "not false witness! But it is true that at the time I would have stopped the marriage by any means in my power; and when this woman—for she was the agent, Mrs. Dormer—solemnly undertook to bring evidence that your intended husband was an unworthy profligate, I felt that as your friend I was right in ascertaining the facts. I did furnish her with the means of going to London. You may think what you please of this, but you will remember that I made no use of any knowledge I had, and that I begged to be allowed to officiate at your marriage."

Before Magdalen could speak—if she meant to speak—Mrs. Faunt broke in:

"He means a lie, m'm, though he does not say it in words. The information I brought him he would have used if he had got it in time; but a scheme was worked by somebody else, who shall settle for it with me some day, and you had been married before I got back to Naybury. Don't allow him to skulk away from your just

contempt. He is bound to me for what I did, and if you ask him whether he pays me money still—whether he paid me any this day, let me hear him deny it." And she held out a hand containing gold.

"Why do I listen to this?" thought Magdalen. "At another time I should have been away before half of these shameful words had been spoken; but I seem in a dream, where there is no escape."

"I will go home," she said; "I am not very strong to-day."

But Edward Grafton, galled into savageness by her apparent acceptance of the woman's story, and by her not even deigning to reproach him for his conduct, exclaimed rudely:

"As the tale has gone so far, I will finish it! It is true, Mrs. Dormer, that I learned, too late, enough to make me clearly understand the painful position in which I know you are now placed. The words of warning which I addressed to you here you despised. They were amply justified. Mr. Dormer has left you, and I well know why. Would I could have saved you, but you would not be saved."

"Saved by *you!*" answered Magdalen, with a sudden up-leap of her old pride, and in a tone that, though low, carried its intensity of contempt into the heart of Edward Grafton. And again she turned away, and walked toward Naybury.

He was by her side in a moment.

"Saved by me! Does your creed, as you call it, teach you to reject a warning because you hate him who warns you? Even from *me*," he said, with a bitter emphasis; "it had been well if you had learned that the man whom you were so glad to marry, reluctantly and at the last moment left a mistress for the sake of taking a rich wife!"

Magdalen's indignant gesture answered him.

"But it is true," he said, "and you know it. Or, if you affect to doubt it, write to him, if he gives you an address, and ask him after the Lady of the Hut, and Mopes, and Dormouse, who are her children—and his."

The malignant pleasure with which he brought out these names suddenly shocked himself; and he saw that she was deadly white.

"I ought not to have said that," was his abrupt speech. "For Heaven's sake pardon me! That hag drove me frantic! I was almost unconscious of what I was saying; but it has lain in my mind so long that I scarce know whether I am speaking of it or only thinking of it. You understand all that I feel—all that I have felt: there is not a word to be said for the conduct you have heard of, except that a love which will never be crushed out of my heart has made me forget all that was due to you and to myself. If you can see any excuses in that, make them for me. I shall never speak to you again."

Of all of which she heard not one word as she hastened on her homeward path.

Mr. Conway was seen coming into the field in which they were.

"Ah!" said Edward, "your father. That is well. But I can not meet him. Magdalen, in God's name, do not think altogether evil of me, but remember!"

He left her, and hurried back in the direction of his own village.

"Too long a walk—sadly too long, my darling," said her father. "You look fearfully ill; and there's no getting a carriage nearer than the road yonder, but it shall meet you there. Let me find you a resting-place until some one passes whom I can send."

"I can walk—I can walk quite well, papa; only let us get home soon."

Magdalen, despite remonstrance, walked faster than Mr. Conway himself would willingly have done, and they speedily reached the house.

Mrs. Conway was at the door, and the sight of Magdalen's white face brought out all the mother's love.

"My own one! what have you been doing? Let me take you—"

"I will come down and speak to you in five minutes," said Magdalen, breaking from her mother's arms, and speaking in a strange voice. "I am quite well. I will come down again directly." And she went up stairs with a rapid step.

Into the library, and to a drawer which had been playfully set apart as her own, and of which Ernest had affected the utmost awe, always begging leave before opening it in search of any missing paper. It was locked.

"Who locked it?" said Magdalen, endeavoring to recall her recollection. "Yes, I locked it myself on the day he went away. I remember why; but I might have spared that trouble."

She found the key, and hastily opened the drawer, throwing aside papers and its other contents until she came upon a note, which she snatched out, and this she read slowly and aloud:

"*As you never were a racing man, it is no good giving you tips, but if you care to know that the Lady of the Hut is all right, Mopes in good form, and Dormouse 'howling' well, you are hereby told how to lay out your money.*"

This was Walter Latrobe's letter, which awaited Ernest on his return after the honey-moon in the Highlands.

"Mamma was right," said Magdalen, after a pause, and speaking in a tone of innocent argument with herself; "I am very young, and these things are all too wonderful for me. If I am in a dream, oh, let me wake—let me wake! But perhaps I am going mad! I can not tell. I must go down stairs and talk to them. Besides, I said I would—yes, I said I would. He let me read that letter, and laugh over it, that is certain, and put meanings to the names, and all the time they were the names—no, that is quite impossible. Only my poor head is getting wrong. I must go down stairs and talk to mamma. Yes, that is certainly the only thing to do."

She went down, and entered the room with a little smile in her face; but there was a wea-

riness there which told what a strain was laid upon the heart.

"There is something here which I don't understand, mamma," she said, gently; "perhaps you will; but if it is any thing against Ernest you are not to tell me. I think I will sit down."

And they were but in time to save her from a heavy fall. There was no doubt as to her fainting now.

CHAPTER LVII.

FAIR PLAY.

WHILE the double blow was falling upon the helpless Magdalen, without the knowledge of her husband, he was striving with all his might to obtain a solution of the mystery which beset them both.

It will be remembered that at the last interview, at the Covent Garden hotel, between Ernest Dormer, Mr. Haslop, and the Sergeant, it was agreed that the latter should, as he desired, take an opportunity of testing the character of Dudley's witness, George Farquhar. We have seen that Sergeant Penguin effected this object in his best manner, carrying that unfortunate witness about London while administering to him the severest castigation, and that the terrified Farquhar was finally dismissed with counsel to take immediate measures for his own safety. Then, invited by Dudley to come to him, Farquhar went, and was ungraciously received, and in fact ordered to return at a more convenient season.

The weak and unlucky young lawyer was placed between two fires, and their effect was very distressing to him. He knew, in the first place, that the statement which he had prepared, and which Dudley had laid before the advisers of Mr. Dormer, contained, with a very slight addition, the truth. But Mr. Farquhar had reached that state of mind in which the morality of what he might be doing did not seem to him by any means a leading consideration. On the one side was Mr. Dudley, restraining the legal proceedings with which he had so effectually frightened Farquhar, but menacing him with their resumption, and the disastrous consequence to the only person in the world for whom George Farquhar cared. On the other side was Sergeant Penguin, as formidable an enemy in regard to the hostilities which he could bring to bear upon Farquhar, and potent not only for immediate, but for future evil. At divers times it actually occurred to the miserable young man that the best thing he could do would be to take himself out of the world. His father, who hated him, could hardly be angry with him for that, and might not proceed to vindicate measures against his mother, whereas, whatever course he might take in the worldly affairs which tormented him, the fatal issue seemed certain—his father would be informed of his worthlessness, and would punish him by proclaiming that which would bring his mother to shame. But Mr. Farquhar easily persuaded himself that there ought to be no haste about an extreme measure.

Ernest Dormer and Penguin met by appointment at Mr. Haslop's on the next day but one after Mr. Farquhar had been dragged round London by the chariot-wheels of the Sergeant.

"I have done as I promised," said the latter. "I have seen this young fellow, Farquhar, and I may say, without self-praise, that I never put a witness to the torture in better style. I regret to have to add that though he is terrified out of his senses he adheres to his story in a way which—which surprised me a little, and when I say that I mean a good deal."

"Which makes you believe that story true?" said Ernest Dormer.

"I will not go so far as that," said the Sergeant. "But he clings to it, and all I could wring out of him was that he would alter one letter in his statement. I have gone through and through it to see what letter, added or taken away, could vary the charge, but without success."

"Have you any advice to offer?" said Haslop.

"None that would be acceptable, I fear. I did myself the honor, at our last meeting, of laying my view of the case before you, and I will not trouble you by repeating it. There are but two things to do."

"And those," said Haslop, "as I understood you to mean, are—"

"Fight, or pay."

"As for the first, you consider that our hands are tied."

"Voluntarily. I have said that if Mrs. Dormer will come into the witness-box, and deny that she was ever in Mr. Vaughan's chambers, I will crush this disreputable apothecary and this profligate apprentice under my heel. But to do less is to play the enemy's game—you save your money, of course, but you give all the world leave to think what it likes."

"And what you are thinking now?" said Mr. Haslop.

"If you force it from me—yes," said Sergeant Penguin.

"Utterly useless as are my words," said Ernest Dormer, "I can not hear what Sergeant Penguin has said without declaring my utter disbelief in the charge, and I call on you both to remember that I have said so."

"Then, Mr Dormer," said the Sergeant, "I have no right to ask you one question, but it doubtless occurs to us all. Why do you not return to Naybury?"

"Yes," said Ernest Dormer, "the question is natural. You must let me answer it at my own time, and in my own way. I may now assume that you have both exhausted all the aid which you can give me."

"I have given you none," said Haslop.

"And I worse than none, I fear," said Penguin.

"On the contrary, you have both said and done much, for which I thank you. Now I will make my own effort to settle the question. You

promised to give me the private address of this Farquhar, Sergeant Penguin."

"That is it," said Penguin, handing him a card. "But I think I may as well say that if you expect to frighten him any more than I have done, you will be disappointed."

"I do not wish to frighten him at all. When a man states what he believes to be the truth (and you have been good enough to elicit that he does this) I see no use in frightening him—you may silence him for the moment, but the truth will come out again one day. I must see him, however."

He rose to go.

"Let me know where to find you," said Haslop. "The club?"

"No, I can not well go there at present. Write to the hotel, if you want me."

"What can he intend to do?" said the Sergeant. "Any thing violent?"

"You heard him say he would not frighten the man."

"No. But we can hurt people without frightening them. He is not going to invite Mr. Farquhar into a mining district, and give him a permanent situation at the bottom of a mine—perhaps."

The Sergeant asked the question—if question it were—in the tone in which he would have inquired whether Haslop was going to dine at Richmond.

"Why do you say such things, Penguin?" said Haslop.

"What a tone, my dear Haslop! No, I do not think that he is going to do any thing of the kind. But such things have been done, and not so very long ago, though it is the fashion to say that they only occur in sensation novels, the only novels, by-the-way, that are worth a man's reading. I hate the books in which people are morally eviscerated and lectured upon—I would rather hear of their being poisoned or knocked on the head. I see I shock your fine taste."

"I am very anxious," said Haslop, entirely passing by the Sergeant's literary confessions, "to know what he is planning."

"What a pity it is, Haslop—do excuse my urging it once more—that with your influence over the lady, you don't induce her to defend herself. Can it be wrong for a woman to defend herself against a scoundrel?"

"I fail to make you see that the course you propose is immoral, so you must be content with my assurance that it is impossible."

"Well, if you regret hereafter that you did not take my advice, recollect that it was given."

"I would rather forget it."

"As you will. But look here. I am, to a certain extent, bound to give this fellow Dudley our *ultimatum*. Not that I care twopence about that, and if you thought that neglecting, and postponing, and wearing him out would be of any use, I can play him for a long time, and something may turn up to help us to deal with him. I am certain that he is, and has been, engaged in disreputable practices before this, and if one could get hold of any of his accomplices, why there we are. But that would take time, and would depend on chance."

"The final decision must come from Dormer, and he does not give it."

"Yes, that is so, of course. And I comprehend his ideas, to a certain extent. You know the best thing that could possibly happen would be that against which he is fighting."

"What?"

"Why, Mrs. Dormer's being made acquainted with the whole story."

"What good could arise from so fearful a thing?" asked Mr. Haslop.

"I suspect that she would take the matter into her own hands. A woman would not live with this sort of cloud hanging over her. If this lady knew all she would be in town in a few hours; and since you say that what I hinted at is impossible, of course it is, and we should settle the matter another way, but settled it would be."

"To tell her would be to kill her, and to drive Dormer from the country."

"Why, then, my dear Haslop, she must not be told. Come in! I beg your pardon for responding to a knock here; I fancied myself at my own place. That's odd, too," he said, as the clerk put a note into his hand. "I had a sort of right to answer. *He* wants to see me."

"Who?"

"Dudley. He is at my place, and my fellow wisely brings round word. What do you say to having him here?"

"Only that I might find it difficult to be civil to him."

"I should not try."

In five minutes more Mr. Dudley was announced.

"A gentleman from whom I have no secrets, Mr. Dudley, and who is quite informed on the subject on which we have spoken."

Mr. Dudley bowed, Mr. Haslop slightly inclined his head.

"Two lawyers to one poor doctor," said Mr. Dudley. "Rather heavy odds, gentlemen."

"I don't suppose that we shall do you any harm, Mr. Dudley," said Penguin, much more familiarly than Haslop liked, "especially as the remark shows you are on guard already."

"We must take care of ourselves in this world," said Mr. Dudley, with a certain pensiveness.

"Yes," said Haslop, scarcely concealing the disdain he felt for the man before him. "We shall be taken care of in the next without our trouble."

"Glad to hear it from so good an authority," said Dudley, defiantly. "But I did not come away from my business to discuss theology, but to see you, Sergeant Penguin, and to ask you what your client intends to do?"

"I have no client who has business with you, so far as I know, Mr. Dudley."

"I dare say we mean the same person, Sir;

but if there's any doubt about him, I will say that I mean a married gentleman from Naybury, whom I saw last night in company with the lady from whom he broke off to marry Miss Conway."

Penguin bit his lip.

"That is a pleasant hearing, Haslop."

"I suppose there is no mistake," said Haslop, pointing his words by addressing them to the Sergeant, and not the speaker.

"A polite way of saying that you suppose I am not telling a falsehood," said Dudley.

"I am unconscious of having meant any politeness," said Haslop.

"Equally obliged," said Dudley, who was full of courage and good-temper that morning. "Well, there was no mistake. I know the lady extremely well, and she has two charming children, and Mr. Dormer's attachment to the three was spoken of in the indecorous circles as something remarkable. I was not surprised to see the acquaintance renewed. When the present little affair is arranged, I dare say the other arrangement will be put on the old footing, and I really don't know that he could do better, speaking of course without reference to the high morals," he added, with an impertinent bow to Mr. Haslop.

"All this is apart from the question, Mr. Dudley," said Penguin, who did not desire any unnecessary disturbance, and who saw the thunder clouds darkening on the brow of Mr. Haslop.

"No doubt, but there seemed some difficulty in identifying the party," said Dudley. "As there is none now, and I have given you a likely sign and token, perhaps I may have an answer."

"I am not in a position to give you an answer to-day, Mr. Dudley."

"Probably you can say when you will be?"

"I rather understood you to intimate that in a matter of so much importance you recognized the propriety of consideration, and that you were in no sort of hurry for a settlement."

"Yes, Sir. But at that time an eminent personage had not been tampering with one of my principal witnesses, and endeavoring to get him out of the way."

"Neither of those two things has been done by me, Mr. Dudley. If I had wished to get your only witness out of the way nothing would have been more easy, as I should think you might know. As to tampering with him, I simply did my duty as an old member of the legal profession to a young one, by warning him of the consequences of perjury for the sake of extortion. It is not new to you, Mr. Dudley, that such is the view I am unfortunately compelled to take of your case; but that fact need not prevent our discussing it with the courtesy of professional men."

"Then, Sir, I merely ask when I may expect a decision?"

"I reply that I am unable to fix the time."

"Exactly so, Sergeant Penguin. When a man is unlucky enough to fall into your hands, he must help himself if he means to come out with a whole skin."

"I humbly endeavor to do my duty, Mr. Dudley."

"Yes, Sir. And every man's first duty is to himself. I have humbly endeavored to do mine in that direction, and I hope to be rewarded. But as you were good enough to talk to me, in your own chambers, about fair play, not, of course, that I was deluded for a moment into supposing that I was to get any, I will show you a little, though you won't show it me."

"It is disgusting to hear words so misused," said Haslop, looking the disgust he felt. "This person must be quite aware that but for a desire to spare the feelings of those who are not to be named on the same day with himself, he would have been kicked out of this room in half a minute from his daring to enter it."

"I came by invitation, Mr. Haslop," said Dudley, with great civility, but with an evil eye.

"That is so," said Penguin; "and besides, nothing is gained by incrimination out of court. What is this fair play, Mr. Dudley, that you were going to be so good as to show us?"

"Only to tell you, gentlemen, that I think it likely that the settlement of this affair will be speedier than you suppose. It may be a convenience to the person who is going to advance the money to know that."

"No one is going to advance any money, Mr. Dudley."

"I am glad to hear, then, that Mr. Dormer has become a capitalist. It is rather lately, I know, as he used to have difficulties in money-matters. However, it may be convenient even to him to know that he will soon be called upon for a certain sum."

"Why do you say this?"

"I would merely say, Sir," said Dudley, speaking slowly, and smiling, "that I have always found lawyers, however eminent, very unpractical in real business. They always go a roundabout way to work. And having some idea that such was the case in the present instance, and that they were not taking counsel with all parties interested, I have ventured on the liberty of bringing the business under the notice of somebody who ought mainly to be consulted."

"Will you favor—"

But what Penguin was about to say was cut short by Haslop, who sprang up with gleaming eyes, and said, in a fierce, low voice:

"Dare to say that you have sent your infernal story to Mrs. Dormer?"

Dudley was not a coward, but the fire in the eyes of Haslop, and the grim and suppressed fury of his voice, fairly cowed the underbred man.

"You will hear in time, I dare say," he said, sullenly. "I shall not remain to be bullied."

And he effected rather a rapid retreat, banging the outside door, however, in demonstration of defiance.

"He has done that," said Haslop, now pale with anger.

"I fear he has."

"It is well for him that he was not within my reach," said Haslop.

"It is well for all of us, if you meant violence," said Penguin, "against which—pardon me—you were preaching just now. And what is the use of it? The mischief is done, though I hope and trust that you anticipate far worse effects than are likely to occur. I have known many cases of suffering by sudden revelations, but I never knew any person finally go down under them."

"You do not know her."

"No, I regret to say. But there is one point of view in which I see a comfort which you refuse to yourself. Believing that there is a great deal in the story, I infer that Mrs. Dormer must have thought over it long and earnestly, and must have been prepared for something like that which has happened. Remember, Farquhar went down and recalled to her memory the Gray's Inn visits. Rely upon it, that you will have better news than you expect. On the whole, I do not see much to regret, except that you are annoyed."

"You have had a previous interview with this fellow. Did he then give the least hint of his diabolical intention?"

"Not the faintest, on my honor."

"You will be glad that you have no share in the responsibility for what is going to happen—my God!—may have happened. Where is the telegraph office for Naybury?"

"In Fleet Street—but what are you going to do?"

"I must know whether this miscreant has killed her."

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE SKELETON IN THE RECTORY.

On leaving Magdalen, Edward Grafton, as has been said, hastened back in the direction of Saxbury. He turned for a moment to see that Mrs. Dormer was on the arm of her father, and then, pulling his hat firmly over his forehead, walked onward, without a look at the cottage before which the stormy interview had taken place.

But his enemy had not done with him.

She was leaning near her doorway, and as Edward was passing she said, in a distinct voice:

"You have seen her for the last time in this world."

The speech arrested him, and he stopped and looked vacantly at the speaker.

"For the last time in this world, Sir. Perhaps you will write to her parents, and ask to be allowed to assist at her funeral. It would show good feeling."

"What are you saying, woman?" he asked, angrily.

"She had enough to bear before, poor lady! Her heart was nearly broken, and with good cause. You need not have run after her to stab her again; but perhaps it's the most merciful way. And parsons should be merciful, you know."

Edward muttered something, which did not reach her.

"I can't hear what you say, Sir, but I am sure it's a prayer for the poor creature, and comes well from you. I am bad enough, Sir," she added, coming up to him, "but I couldn't have served my worst enemy so, knowing what had come upon her."

"What has come upon her?" he asked, fiercely, "except separation from a man who was unworthy of her."

"You are a bad actor, Mr. Edward Grafton. Once I thought you were a better one, but I made a mistake. I can see in your face that you know what has been done to her. I don't forget what you came and said to me about spreading reports against a lady's character. But it wasn't worth while to try and play that game with me. I did not think, though, that your revenge would carry you so far, or I would not have spoken out just now, for all your insults."

"You are mad as well as malignant," said Edward. "I know not why I speak to you."

"Because you can not help it. Because when we have done a bad, wicked thing, we get ease in talking about it, and trying to get somebody else to seem to share the crime. I know the feeling, Sir; but we don't get much help out of it, and when you get home and consider what you have done, you'll wish that you had been struck down on that path as you were coming over here to-day."

"I may," said Edward to himself, rather than to her.

"It was well done, that getting the dreadful letter to her. I could not have done a trick of the kind better myself in the days when it was my business to do that sort of thing, though I never did any thing quite so wicked as that."

"What letter? I know of no letter."

"Don't, Sir; it can be of no good, and you do it so badly. What's the value of my opinion of you that you should try to deceive me? which you don't in the least. Perhaps you think I don't know what passed between you and Chervil, that stuck-up druggist?"

"You can not. We were alone, and he would not have told you."

"That is my affair. But I do know, Sir; and I know also that you gave him a letter; also that afterward, and as you had arranged, he had another visitor, who sent away a person on the wicked errand, and it was done. You need not glare at me, Sir! I have not done with you yet, and when I have there will be somebody else to call you to account for your share in the business. And mind this, Mr. Edward Grafton, the story that you and others have conspired to raise against that lady is a lie; and you'll find it out when it is too late, and when those who love her come for their revenge. If I might make so bold, Sir, I think you had better go home."

"Not, by ——!" cried the young clergyman, now infuriated beyond self-restraint at her hints and menace, "not until I have dragged your cursed meaning out of you!"

And he tore open the cottage gate, and confronted the woman. Had she sought to move, he would have seized her perhaps by the throat; but she stood firm.

"That's looks more real, Sir, and I have angered you into being more natural. But what's the good of raging? You have your vengeance for the time being. The lady would not have you, and preferred another. Women will do these things, and some men take their chance and bear no malice. You are not one of that sort, and you bear a deal. You have bided your time well, I must say that; and now you have struck hard—so hard that the lady who would not love you will not have long to love any body else. She knew that she was accused of a wickedness she can not even understand; and while she was staggering, as one may say, under that blow, you lay in wait for her, and strike her again to the very heart by telling her that her husband was false to her. Now her poor old father has taken her home to die, and you can go home and make a sermon about the afflictions of the righteous. But you had better put in a bit about the afflictions of people who are not righteous, as it may be useful to you yourself one of these days."

But he was not heeding the last words, in which she disported herself, after her fashion, with an insolence that furbished itself out in scraps and rags of good things which must at one time have been familiar to her.

"Taken her home to die?"

"Yes, that is so, Sir, if I know any thing about the face of a woman who is struck home; and I have seen some. So you may make the most of your triumph while it lasts, for I don't think it will be very long. She always behaved to me like a lady, and I shall say, as I do now, that she has been cruelly treated for listening to her own heart."

"Woman!" said Edward Grafton, grinding his teeth, "is it for you to talk so? Who first put into my head the thought of making the inquiries? Who brought the tale to me? I curse myself for having listened to you, but it is not for you to whine out compassion."

"And this is the parson of Saxbury, who has the care of all the immortal souls in the place, and has to guide them in this world and for the next one; and here he is complaining to a poor ignorant old woman that she led him into murder! That's laughable, isn't it, Sir, if you was in a laughing mind?"

He said two or three words of bad import, and left her.

"He is a stronger man and a weaker man than I thought to find him," said Mrs. Faunt, turning into her cottage. "I believed that he would have struck me, and I don't know that I should have hated him any more for that. I hate milksops. But people are not what they were. Men are all so civil and timid in these days. Nobody has spirits for a real row. And to think on what I have seen done when a man had the pluck to go half mad and show it."

Some recollections of passages in her own evil old days silenced her for a time. Then she said:

"Ah! that breed's out. And more's the pity, though I'm too old to hold my own now. But if this business goes off without grief to somebody I'm out. My friend, Benjamin Dudley, has played his game at last, but he will find it's no child's play. If that Lucy makes a mistake, and she's just the fool to do it, and loses her hold on Dormer, and Dormer, true to his wife, comes down on Dudley—I'd give a year of life to see it," said the old heathen, fervently, "and I have not so many years to gamble with."

When Edward Grafton reached the Rectory at Saxbury he saw a carriage at the door. It was a hired carriage, he noticed.

"Who is here?" he mechanically asked as he went in.

"Mr. Abbott, Sir."

Edward was passing on to his own study, a quiet and secluded room at the end of a long passage, when he heard Abbott's voice.

"Is that you, Edward?"

"Yes, Mr. Abbott."

"I will come to your room. I want a few words with you."

He could not have been more unwelcome; but Edward Grafton had no choice but to ask him into the study.

"A snug place enough, my dear Edward," said the lawyer, "and like every man's own private den, it has gradually been furnished and fitted to your own tastes, I see. I wish that I had a pleasanter story to tell the first time I come in."

"Any thing disagreeable?" said Edward, languidly.

"Yes. You are a man of sense and of courage, and it is of no use my beating round the bush, is it?"

"No, no, tell me at once."

"Moreover, I take it, you must have been prepared for something of the sort, as you must have observed your father and mother of late, and noticed many things that point at a certain result."

"Pecuniary trouble, I suppose?"

"Yes, that is part of it. The fault has not been mine. I have given advice which would have prevented it; but that advice was not taken, and a crisis has come."

"Have we been extravagant?"

"There it is—I can not say so. I come here a good deal, and I see nothing which can be called extravagant, when income is considered, and your father's position. He keeps a good table, and has a carriage, as the Rector of Saxbury ought to be able to afford to do. He is decorous in regard to charities; but I only quote his words when I remind you that he has always been opposed to the custom which some clergy-

men have of beggaring themselves for the sake of the poor of their flock. Some men give away great quantities of money this way, but Mr. Grafton, on principle, has always refused to do it, and has incurred some obloquy in consequence."

"My mother is most economical."

"The best and most thoughtful wife in the world. I love her as a sister, but that is no news to you. Your father has had plenty of money. I have also obtained a good deal for him. I see nothing to show for it. But he can not go on."

"What do we do?" asked Edward, in a tone that almost irritated the good-natured lawyer, it seemed to evince so little interest in the question.

"Well, to do you justice, Edward, you take things with a coolness which would have done honor to an impassive dandy of the old days. When I look at you again, my dear boy, I beg your pardon. I see you are ill."

"Yes, I am ill," said Edward; "but no matter. Tell me all, Mr. Abbott, please, and excuse my short answers."

"I like short answers if they are incisive. Well, the state of the case is just this. I can manage to save the Rectory, but your father can not live here."

"And where is my mother to go?"

"Is not her place with him?"

"I do not know. You have something more to say?"

"The difficulty I have in saying any more arises from my ignorance as to whether you know something which—how shall I put it?—which your father has probably not confided to you."

"I have certain suspicions; but you had better speak, please, as if I knew nothing at all."

"You have had those suspicions for a long time, or have they come to you recently?"

"They arose a long time back, before I went to college; and when, being young, I was perhaps not supposed to take notice of certain matters, of which, perhaps, I took the wrong kind of notice."

"And they connect themselves with any member of this household?"

"Of the household—not of the family."

"I understand you. And without asking for more than you care to give, may I inquire what your idea was? The remark you just made about your mother leads me to this question."

"Answer me as a man of honor, Mr. Abbott. Are you in possession of all my father's secrets, or do you believe that you are?"

"Not quite all. He keeps something back. But I know enough, from his own lips, and from another source—"

"Not my mother?"

"Edward, she would sooner die than give a stranger a confidence about her husband."

"That is true—I beg your pardon."

"Not for showing your reverence for her, Edward. I was going to say that, one way and another, I know a good deal about Mr. Grafton. Is that an answer?"

"Then you know, or believe, that there is a certain family story which had better be left untold."

"I know that of about every family with which I am acquainted. Sometimes the characters of the story are the heads of the family, or one of them, sometimes they are near relations, sometimes relations not so near; but I know few houses in which somebody would not feel relieved at the extinction of some member of the family, and the obliteration of his or her history. So do not imagine that you are singular in having a scandal in the midst of you."

Edward Grafton's thoughts were reverting to another household, of which he had heard much that day; but he hastily caught at the last words, and said:

"No doubt, though there is small comfort in that. Well, Mr. Abbott, what do we come to? Is there a plan?"

"Yes," said Mr. Abbott, "if we may call it so. We have been thinking over the matter very much, and if you have not been called in to assist in the deliberations it has only been because you could do no good, and because you have seemed of late somewhat inclined to estrange yourself—that is your father's word—from family counsels."

"It may be so. I meant nothing unfilial. I have been much occupied."

"Yes, no doubt. This is not the moment for venturing on a word of advice on a delicate subject, but I may speak of that hereafter. We have, as I say, been considering the question of the future. No decision can be complete without your assent. But what we propose is, that you shall, for a time, remain in charge here—your mother's health is an ample reason why the Rector should remove her to other air—and while I try my best to adjust difficulties, which are really of a most serious kind, you will have leisure to see whether you will settle here. Why should I not say at once that a good marriage would much facilitate matters? And if you have any thing of the kind in your eye, so much the better."

"I should be a good match, should I not?" said Edward, bitterly.

"You are young, handsome, eloquent, and a clergyman. With these cards you ought to win any game; besides that, there is one already won for you. But we will not speak of this now, as I see the subject is distasteful."

"I would sooner take a curacy in some remote county, and trouble no one," said Edward, "if arrangements could be made for my mother's comfort."

"That is a foolish notion—pardon me—Edward. This is a dull place enough, and the Saxbury clowns are not an audience you can care about; but here you have a certain position, and a reputation, and the Bishop has heard of you; I can tell you that; indeed, I meant to

have told you sooner. His lordship has a belief in good preachers, and preaching is your forte."

Even in the trouble of that day this hint brought a flush of pride over the face of Edward Grafton.

"If my mind were at ease," he said, "I might perhaps do some good in that way. But are matters pressing?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Abbott. "I came over, at great inconvenience, to say so; and if my advice is taken, as I suppose it will be now, the day will not be over before the establishment is put upon curate footing, the needless servants having notice, and preparations being made for your father and mother's departure."

"And Mrs. Sullage?"

"Oh! you have condescended to think of her at last, have you?" said a tall lady, in black, who entered and took a seat between the two gentlemen. "Mrs. Sullage may have something to say in these pleasant arrangements."

Long ago, and before the marriage of Ernest and Magdalen, there was a conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Conway, in which the character of this personage was discussed, with the disadvantage that neither of the speakers had any very definite ideas about her. Mrs. Conway, desirous of impressing upon her husband an unfavorable view of the household at Saxbury, reminded him of a dark-looking lady who sometimes dined at the table, and was said to be staying in the house. Mr. Conway saw little in the circumstance, but his wife alleged that Mrs. Sullage was objectionably connected with some part of the earlier history of the Reverend Theodore Grafton, and that she was only tolerated by the Mrs. Grafton of our acquaintance by reason of a strong pressure put upon her inclinations by her imperious husband. It may also be remembered that upon a still more distant occasion, when Edward Grafton was a Cambridge student, he came to Marley House under an influence which induced its kind-hearted mistress to resort to an extreme measure for preventing him from disgracing himself before the domestics, and that at that time he gave vent to something in reference to his father and Mrs. Sullage which Mrs. Conway took care should go no further.

She had been handsome, but her beauty had been of a severe and high-nosed type, and years had not given her the softness of voice and manner which alone can make that style of face endurable when the roundness of cheek is gone, and the countenance becomes hard, and the expression antagonistic. The only portion of Mrs. Sullage's head on which the eye rested with any sort of satisfaction was a mass of black, somewhat coarse, but undeniably rich hair, amidst which there was no streak of gray. But even here there were locks of crisp and defiant growth, which held themselves together as with a will, and by no means invited the caressing hand. It was a fine head of hair, but not of the kind in whose tangles the lover of Neæra, or any other gentle lady, would care to be caught. Her figure, however, was fuller than you would have expected to find it, after a first glance at the face, and the close-fitting black dress showed an arm of symmetry, and perhaps of power.

Mrs. Sullage's manner was not rude, though she had just been committing the rudeness of listening at the door of the study. That fact she actually announced by her first words, and she had no more to say about it one way or the other. There was even a touch of the confidential in her tone, as if they had all three been plotting, only her place had hitherto been outside the room.

"And Mrs. Sullage," she repeated, quietly. "What about her?"

"My dear lady," said Mr. Abbott (who always overflowed with conversational affection when talking to women, and found it generally answered), "it is not for me to interfere with Mr. Grafton's guests."

"I do not say that it is; but as you are settling arrangements, I should like to know what Mr. Grafton suggests about myself?"

"Upon my honor we have not spoken upon the subject."

"It is high time that you should speak on it, then, Mr. Abbott," said Mrs. Sullage, quietly.

"The Rector is conspicuous for his attention to ladies, my dear Mrs. Sullage, and you can not suppose that he will overlook any thing which he ought to remember."

"Mr. Abbott, I listened to your talk to Edward."

"Nothing was said, I am sure, that we could wish to keep from the ear of Mrs. Sullage," replied Mr. Abbott, smiling.

"No, probably not. But I may as well tell you that I always listen at doors when I think that any thing which concerns me is taking place on the other side."

"Your charming frankness, Mrs. Sullage, more than atones for your justifiable contempt for the usages."

"You understand me, Mr. Abbott, and you need not manufacture any more of those sugar-plum phrases which appear to give you so much satisfaction. You know I mean that other things have been said which have not escaped my hearing, and that I have only waited my time to say that something has not yet been thought of—to my satisfaction."

"Very well, Mrs. Sullage; and suppose, without further expenditure of sugar-plums, you tell me what that something is."

"That is quite needless; and you might remember that Edward is present."

"I shall be glad to go away," said Edward Grafton. "Perhaps you will join me out of doors, Mr. Abbott; I want fresh air."

"I would rather that you remained, Edward. I am sure that Mrs. Sullage will say nothing that should hurt your feelings."

"What's the use of saying that?" replied Mrs. Sullage, impatiently. "Of course, if you prefer my talking over the matter with Mrs.

Grafton, I am ready to do so," she added, and closed her hard lips.

"I do not wish it," said Edward. "My mother is in no state to talk over business. I would rather that if any thing is to be said, it were said to us here. I shall not be—hurt, as Mr. Abbott says."

"But I shall, Edward," said Mrs. Sullage, "if you adopt that abrupt manner with me. I have no quarrel with you, as you know."

"With no one, I hope, in this house," suggested Mr. Abbott.

"With you, Mr. Abbott, most assuredly, and for good cause. Do you think that I am not aware of the sort of advice you give to Mr. Grafton about me? Pray waste no more time and talk in fencing with the subject. I do not lose my temper, partly because it is not my habit, and partly because you are so ignorant of circumstances that I only smile when I hear you advising Mr. Grafton to do that which he knows is impossible."

"Then, my dear lady, I do not quite see why you honor me with a quarrel."

"Because your ridiculous advice, given in the dark, is only embarrassing your client."

"I can advise only upon what my client is pleased to tell me."

"And he dares not tell you the truth, or, at all events, he does not. You want him to leave Saxbury, and then when he has lived in retirement for a little time, and he is lost sight of, you propose to take him to Switzerland, where, under an assumed name, he may live in an obscure village, while you gradually wear out some of his creditors, and buy off others."

"Is that the plan?" said Edward Grafton, looking at the lawyer.

"Let him answer you, Edward, though you need not show such marked distrust of my word. A hint, Edward Grafton. I have no reason to be your enemy—at least, none that shall make me so. But don't *you* do it."

Her manner was more than kindly, for the moment. It was almost motherly. And when she finished she threw some eau-de-Cologne, from a small bottle in her hand, upon Edward's handkerchief, which was lying near him.

"A headache, I see," said Mrs. Sullage. "There are worse things than that, Edward, and we must learn to bear them."

"Admirably said," answered Mr. Abbott. "But there is no sense in bearing more than we can help."

Mrs. Sullage looked at him keenly, and her dark eyes rested on his face for some moments.

"I understand," she said; "but there is no help, Mr. Abbott."

"It may be so."

"And do you beware of trying to help it," she added, suddenly turning on him, but not raising her voice. "It would be the worst day's work you ever did for a client, Mr. Abbott."

"And that's saying a good deal, Mrs. Sullage," laughed the lawyer. But though he laughed with his lips his eyes were leveled at her in a way which might imply that if he knew the ground he would wrestle for a fall. "Do you understand this, Edward?" he said, with some sarcasm, rare in him.

"I only understand Mrs. Sullage to be good enough to intimate that she has some hold over the Rector which prevents his being a free agent. I have supposed this all along; but as it never was my business to speak about it, of course I held my tongue. But if the household is now to break up, and I am to be the representative of our name, the time seems to have come for me to know something about this hold, and whether—"

"Finish, Edward," said Mrs. Sullage, as his voice dropped into the mumble which we use when we either desire that our friends should finish the sentence, or we do not care enough about them to take the trouble of completing it for them.

"And whether," said Edward, distinctly enough, "it can not be broken off, as a good many of such things can when they come to be handled."

"You have found it so, Edward," said Mrs. Sullage, gently. "You have found it so where you have been visiting to-day. Nay, don't look angry, and suppose you are watched; but we can see across the fields to Trafalgar from my side-window—at least, with a glass, and I happened to be trying one."

"I scorn to cavil, Mrs. Sullage," said Mr. Abbott; "but the best glass that has ever come in my way has failed to reveal conversation."

"He shall know about that, too, when he pleases to ask," said Mrs. Sullage. "It is not a matter that he need trouble you with, I believe. Why did you suppose the existence of this hold over Mr. Grafton, Edward?"

"I can hardly answer without giving offense."

"Try."

"Because I knew your presence in this house to be offensive to my mother."

"Did she ever say so?"

"Never."

"I am glad to hear it—very glad. No, Edward, the hold can not be broken. I give you my word for that, and if you choose to refuse me belief, I can give you an assurance that will at once remove all doubt; but it will do so at a price which you will think too high."

"Not now, at all events," said Edward, hurriedly. He had been so shaken by the previous incidents of the day that he nervously dreaded to hear any thing more; and he imagined that her words might point in the direction of his mother.

"Do not be afraid. I am not of the melodramatic class of women who love to break upon folk with sudden words and surprises. I have seen too much of sad astonishment to care for that sort of thing. When you want to know what I have to tell you sit down beside me on the sofa; and, if you like, draw my face near to yours by a lock of my hair. I will whisper to you for a quarter of a minute, and those

around shall not know from me that I have not asked you about some young lady—Miss Phœbe, perhaps. Fear no outbreak of mine—you, at least, need fear none. But understand all the time that the hold is not to be broken, Edward."

She said this slowly, almost playfully. And then she rose, threw some more perfumed water on his handkerchief, and left the room without taking any further notice of Mr. Abbott.

"A pleasant suggestion, Edward, that you should draw her to you by the hair, as if she were some young and pretty girl on whom you were on the best flirting terms."

"That was not quite the spirit," said Edward, whose instinctive sense led him to reject the interpretation the now incensed Mr. Abbott chose to put upon her words. "But I am as likely to do it in one sense as the other—a woman whose presence is a sorrow to my mother. Are we to say more now about this matter?"

"I believe that I must have some words with the Rector, and though they will be most disagreeable words, I see no escape. If this black-haired woman speaks the truth—but we shall see. Edward, amidst all her insolence she said one good thing. It hinted at riches and good fortune for you."

"What was that?"

"Phœbe."

CHAPTER LIX.

THE NEWS SPREADS.

"PHŒBE!"

For some time after the lawyer had left him the word seemed to convey no meaning to Edward Grafton. But when the purport of Mr. Abbott's hint reached Edward's mind the incongruity of the idea with the thoughts that were then agitating him was so strange that it forced from him a short and savage laugh.

It was heard by his mother, who was coming to his room.

"I do not like to hear such a laugh as that, Edward. It sounds as if you were not ready to meet our troubles as they should be met, dear. But perhaps Mr. Abbott has been painting them in blacker colors than was necessary. It is certain that we shall have sacrifices to make; but the heaviest of them is that we must part from you—for a time."

"That *you* must, mother. There is no one else to care about it."

"Edward, you are inclined to wrong your father—to undervalue his affection for you—his pride in you. He never was one to make much show of regard, but he has far deeper feeling than you suppose. And I am sure, dear, that it is not in the hour of his trouble that you will let him see that you are cold toward him."

"I will be all you wish, mother—let us say no more about this. Had you any thing to tell me—as if not, I ought to go out?"

"Then I will not detain you. It was natural, was it not, Edward, that your mother should come to you as soon as you had been told what must happen? You have not let us see much of you lately, and out of the few hours that are left do be with me as many as you can. God only knows what our future life will be, and whether we shall ever be together again! But go now, if you must, and come back soon."

She threw her arms round him, kissed him affectionately, and went away.

He did not notice that as she went she took up a trifling article from his desk—it was only a little pen-wiper that she had given him—and carried it away with her, to keep as a tiny memento of his home—mothers do these silly things, and when mothers are gone to heaven, and their hoards are ransacked, there is wonder why such bits of rubbish have been put away, and there is no one in this world who can say.

"I can not sit here," he said. "I must go into the town. I must hear something. I wonder who attends them—I think it is Beccles. If I could see him!"

He left the Rectory, and went into Naybury, avoiding the short way across the fields and getting into the high-road as soon as possible. It much lengthened the walk, which annoyed him, but he could not again pass the cottages. The people of Naybury were not much given to walking outside the town—the scenery was uninviting, and at stated intervals a flood of noisy, slatternly, depraved work-girls was let loose upon the roads, and their talk, at its mildest, was not for the ears of decent women. It was only a few of the stronger-minded ladies, who visited the poor, and otherwise did good according to their abilities, who were often to be met in the neighborhood. As it chanced, this was a visiting-day with two or three of the ladies of Dorcas, and Edward Grafton, who on an ordinary occasion would have leaped a gate to get out of the way of any of the more distinguished of that association, was actually glad to see Mrs. Mainwaring and Mrs. Cutcheon, two of its most shining and disagreeable lights, making their way along the dusty road.

"They are gossips," he said—it may be that he used up, in their honor, some word he should have left behind him at Cambridge—"and they may know something."

So he saluted them gravely, as became a clergyman, and the ladies were in nowise reluctant to chat. It is uncharitable to suppose that they sought to entangle him in his talk, but as spiritual police the leading Dorcasians held themselves bound to hear as much as they could.

After a few harmless exchanges, Edward said,

"Do you happen to know, Mrs. Mainwaring, whether Mr. Beccles is about the town today?"

"I rather think so. I hope that nobody at the Rectory requires his services."

"Thanks, no; I only wanted to ask him a question."

"I think I saw him riding up the hill," said Mrs. Cutcheon, "about an hour ago."

"Ah! then he would be going into the country."

"Well, not necessarily. He might be going to call on your friends at Marley House," said Mrs. Cutcheon, with an emphasis on the last pronoun.

"Is any one ill there?" asked Edward. "I hope not."

"I have not heard so," said Mrs. Cutcheon, "but it would not surprise me to hear that Mr. Beccles had been wanted. But we need not talk of such things to unmarried gentlemen."

"I was not aware—" said Edward Grafton.

A thought which need not be written came upon him, and he flushed, and almost trembled. His companions, of course, with their sharp, matronly eyes, noted the first sign, but his agitation escaped them. He might, perhaps, have been commended for blushing—that kind of jest came within the license as well as the taste of the Dorcas ladies—but Mrs. Cutcheon was too eager for other sport to indulge in playfulness. She chose to misunderstand him.

"No, I suppose not," she said. "That kind of business is seldom talked about, and I must say that at Marley House they understand how to keep their own secrets. Still, it is known, as such things must be."

"Mr. Grafton knows, I make no doubt," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "and it is natural that as a friend of the family he should assume ignorance. I am glad to see that he has so much discretion."

"I fear we are at cross purposes, Mrs. Mainwaring," said Edward, irritated at their talk, but aware that to show irritation would defeat his object.

"Well, remember that you heard nothing from me," said Mrs. Cutcheon.

"But is there any thing to hear?" replied Edward, trying to conceal his exceeding anxiety. "I will call at Marley House; that will be the best way of my hearing it." He knew that he dared not, but they could not know that.

"Yes, you can call there," said Mrs. Cutcheon; "but you will not be told much; and you will not see the lady herself."

"Mrs. Conway?"

"Mrs. Dormer. She is not allowed to see any body."

"But I shall see Mrs. Conway."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Cutcheon, with a short laugh, while her friend merely smiled.

Edward felt that he could gladly fling both of the excellent women under the wheels of the wagon which was just then passing, and whose noise stopped the conversation. It was soon resumed.

"Be very careful in what you say to Mrs. Conway," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "She is a very attached mother, and I make no doubt is plunged into the utmost grief by what we have heard of. Above all, make no allusion to legal proceedings. It will be time enough to talk about those when they are announced in the papers."

"You are disinclined to believe that I do not understand you," said Edward Grafton; "but it is true."

"I almost think it is," said Mrs. Cutcheon, her yellowish eyes gleaming with a cat-like pleasure at her being able to pounce on him with a piece of news. "Divorce," she whispered, darting at him as she spoke, and then drawing back to survey the effect.

"Divorce! Who—which—I mean, of course—Mrs. Dormer asks to be divorced? You must be in a grievous error."

"You like him so much, you think so well of him?" said Mrs. Cutcheon, playing with her victim.

"I may not think highly of him; but what you assert is impossible, Mrs. Cutcheon."

"I have asserted nothing—please remember that; I only tell you what is said. And I agree with you that what you suggest about your friend Mr. Dormer would be impossible; because to get rid of a husband he must not only be an immoral man, but a cruel one, according to our beautiful and humane laws. Now, Mr. Dormer may be the one—I know nothing about him; but I do not believe that he is the other."

"He divorces *her*, they say," said Mrs. Mainwaring, in the most unfair and unchristianlike manner cutting in, and defrauding her friend of the pleasure of telling the story to which she had been leading up. But her friend was equal to the occasion.

"At least Mrs. Mainwaring says so."

"I, my dear! I know it from you only," said the other lady, frightened; for Edward Grafton's look became actually savage.

"It must be a cruel falsehood!" he said.

"You are very good to say so," replied Mrs. Cutcheon, who was not at all frightened at black looks, of which she received plenty at home, not always causelessly; "every body must admire your constancy of belief in the lady, especially as your friends make it no secret that you had reason not to be pleased with her conduct."

"Any of my friends who speak in that way will do well to speak out of my hearing," said Edward Grafton; "but," he added, "you have startled me so by this story that you must excuse my vehemence. The thing is outrageous—it is out of the question!"

"In that case," said Mrs. Cutcheon, coolly, "it will fall to the ground, and we shall know that there was nothing in it; and I am sure we shall all rejoice. But in the mean time it is quite certain that Mr. Dormer has caused a notice to be served upon Mrs. Dormer, and that it had to be done through a window, because such precautions were taken to avoid it."

"The hag has told the truth!" said Edward, walking away without another word.

"Well!" said Mrs. Cutcheon.

"That young man's insolence can only be accounted for by madness," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "What he said to dear Mrs. Bulliman was bad enough; but that he should in the

public road call you a hag, is beyond bearing. Of course you will make Mr. Cutcheon take notice of it."

"But I do not think that he meant the word for me," said Mrs. Cutcheon.

"Who then?" said her friend.

"For you, my dear. It was you who used the word divorce as against Mrs. Dormer, you know. You were in such a hurry to tell the tale yourself that you forgot all precaution, and if there should be nothing in the matter Mr. Mainwaring may have to account to Mr. Dormer. You should be more careful of your tongue, dear. I know that you mean well, but you know what James says of your unruly member."

James happened to be Mr. Cutcheon's Christian name, and it did not occur to the rebuked Mrs. Mainwaring that her friend was alluding to a much higher authority—an illustration of the occasional inconvenience caused by the evangelical habit of omitting the reverent prefix.

"Mr. James Cutcheon will be well to mind his own business," said the incensed Mrs. Mainwaring. "I have read something about those who can not guide their own households, yet assume other duties."

"I alluded to the apostle, Mrs. Mainwaring."

"Very well," said Mrs. Mainwaring; "then I shall be obliged by your abstaining from alluding to the apostles in reference to me. Such things are quite uncalled for."

"My dear," said Mrs. Cutcheon, who enjoyed her double victory, and could afford to keep her temper, "injustice is unworthy of you as a lady, not to say one who knows better things. Mr. Grafton called you a hag—do not vent your ill-temper on me."

"I believe that he meant nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "The whole detail of the story was guess; and besides, it stands to reason that such a term, coarse and offensive as it was, of course should be applied to a person advanced in years rather than to the middle-aged."

"Yes, my dear. But when you talk about middle age, do you know what Mr. Fanshaw said?"

"I neither know nor care."

"He said that somebody's still pretending to middle age reminded him of a good specimen of medieval brass. I would not repeat such a thing to any body else, and I don't like Mr. Fanshaw; but it was rather clever."

The debate might have been protracted, but providentially a poor girl came up who had absented herself from the Sunday-school, and the energies of the serious matrons were turned into another direction, and with effect; for the girl went away soon afterward howling dismally at the thought of the spiritual, and still more at that of the temporal, penalties with which she had been threatened. She would come under a judgment for neglecting her opportunities of saving her soul, and her mother's allowance of potatoes should certainly be stopped.

Whether they believed that the first event would happen it is hard to say: they, perhaps, thought that they did. But, in spite of their tongues and their scandals, they had no more real intention of stopping the potatoes than they had of stopping the railway train which at that moment left Naybury, taking Mr. Conway to London.

The last scene with Magdalen had settled Mr. Conway's determination. The letter which had dropped from her lifeless hands had been read and reread, but it defied interpretation by her parents. Only they caught at her words, "any thing against Ernest." There was something against him, then, or their child thought so, and he was neglecting her. Even Mrs. Conway could no longer oppose her husband's journey.

"But you will be gentle with him, William? Do not let us think of our own just anger, but of her happiness."

"You have my promise."

Mr. Beccles had been sent for, and had arrived. He looked very grave when he caught sight of Magdalen, to whom he was much attached. His orders, of course, were such as would have prevented the parents from allowing her to say a word to them on the one subject next their hearts. But Magdalen had no speech for them. She was removed to her bed, and, save for a short low moaning which she uttered at intervals, after her recovery from her first insensibility, she gave few signs of life. But Mr. Beccles gave the judgment, without which Mr. Conway would not have left the house. The doctor saw no reason against the journey; he was a man of few words, but they were trustworthy. With a heavy heart, therefore, Mr. Conway went up to town.

He drove to the club, to ascertain Ernest's address. It was given him on his mentioning his relationship, and that there was illness at home.

"But perhaps he is here?"

He was not there; he had not been there for several days, and there were letters for him, which, perhaps, Mr. Conway would mention. The porter took them from the pigeon-hole, and mentioned their number. One of them Mr. Conway instantly recognized as the packet which poor Magdalen had sent off in his presence.

"He has not even fetched her letters," thought the father. "I will take them to him, if you please," he said. "I am going direct to his hotel."

The trusty official hesitated.

"I have no orders, Sir," he said, "and though I have no doubt that it would be all right—"

"True. Is Mr. Mangles here?"

"I think not, Sir, but I will inquire."

"Mr. Mangles is not in the house, I know," said a gentleman who just then came down; "I am going to meet him; shall I take your card?" he added, seeing that the inquirer was the sort of person to whom instinct tells one that it will be safe and pleasant to be civil. "'Mr. Conway, Naybury.' Oh, I know that Mangles will be very much vexed to have missed you!"

"I might give this gentleman Mr. Dormer's letters, Sir?"

"Of course you may. Certainly. My name is Launceston," said the member, raising his hat; "I need not say that yours is well known to several of us. So well that I may almost venture to ask after Mrs. Dormer, though I have not the honor of her acquaintance."

"She is very ill, I am grieved to say," said Mr. Conway.

"May I hope not ill enough to have caused your journey to town?"

"Indeed—yes," said Mr. Conway, with emotion. Remember that he was not now a man of society, and he had suddenly come off a solitary ride and into a fine house, where the mention of his name instantly brought him kindness, and where the very first comer had a kind word for him about his child. All men's nerves are not in the same order.

"Several men—though not known to you, Mr. Conway—will be much pained at hearing this. You are going to Ernest, of course; have you a cab? Can we send round and see whether he is there?"

"Thanks; I will take my chance."

The younger man held the door open for the elder one, and followed him to the carriage.

"Ernest must let us hear, Mr. Conway," said Charles Launceston, earnestly, as he again raised his hat.

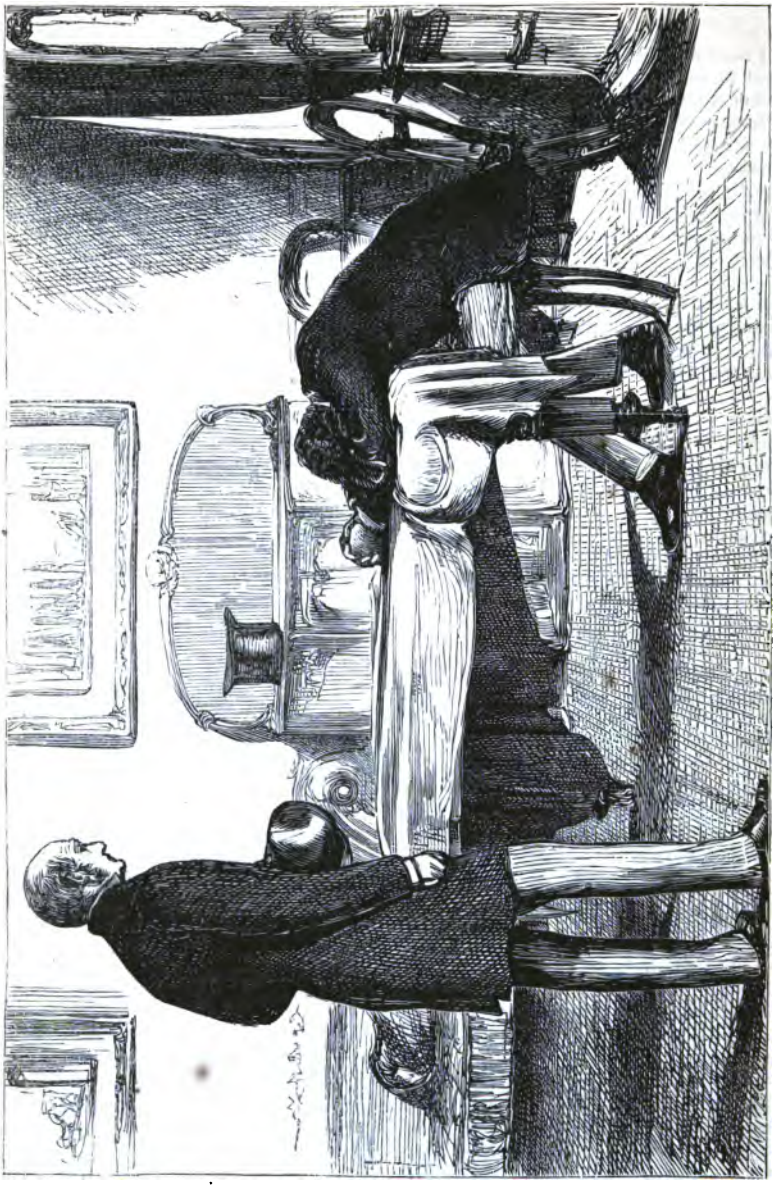
"That looks bad," said Launceston to himself, re-entering the house. "Why needed the father to come up to town, when there are telegraph wires that would have brought the message instantly? There is something wrong. By Jove, too, I don't know what business I had to let the porter give him the letters! I may have done ever so much mischief. But he looked so good that it never crossed my mind that it might not be well to let him have them. One was a big one, in a woman's hand too. By Jove! I have been an ass for the fiftieth time this week. Some weeks a man does nothing else but asinine things; perhaps there's something of transmigration in it. I'll ask Mangles. I am awfully sorry that poor little woman is so ill, and no doubt the circumstances have a great deal to do with it. If she should die I know one or two men who ought to be hit hard. Waiter, a glass of sherry and bitters."

Launceston was engaged to dine with Mangles in chambers. These little gatherings were not to be despised. There was no attempt at high art cookery, but there were, perhaps, four things, each the best that could be got for money, and each from the house noted for giving best value for money. All was as simple as the nature of the dish permitted—some call a rich and elaborate pudding with meat and three kinds of birds in it, and kidneys, simple—but all was admirable, and Mangles's wines were unexceptionable. Proof that the repast was digestible, and that the liquids were wholesome, was found in the fact that when his guests got to cards, as they did very soon after dinner, they never wrangled over their game, and even occasionally allowed that their partner's play was not altogether intolerable. Then there were new books about, and men picked up material for talk elsewhere, especially with the aid of the host, who was a sort of cyclopædia, with the added advantage of instantly affording you an answer, instead of maddening you by desiring you to inquire elsewhere. Altogether, one of Mangles's evenings at home was about as rational a contrivance for getting over a few hours more of this miserable life as a rational man could desire. And he sorted his guests a little, not in the absurd way in which some well-meaning folks do it, namely, that of asking men of similar tastes, as they call it (as if two men's tastes were ever really similar), whereby having bored yourself in your own vocation, actual or supposed, all day, you are bored again by talking about it all night. He threw together perhaps a reading man, and a talking man, and a medicine man, and a horsey man, and all went away with something new in their heads, and each convinced that he had been the soul of the party. And then Mangles rewarded himself—he held that it was quite worth while to give a party for the sake of the one cigar after every body was gone.

It was to one of these parties that he had courteously bidden Charles Launceston, who had instantly thrown over a dinner in Harley Street to which he had been engaged for three weeks. How men can do these things, which can not be done without one frightful falsehood, and without exciting wrath in persons who meant civilly, is a question for the moralist; and let him who has always kept an engagement that bored him, when tempted by an engagement that would not bore him, say something very strong about selfish and ungentlemanly conduct. The sentiments will do him honor, and be all right; but men will be missed from genteel parties yet, and not be found in the beds to which they unblushingly state that they have been driven by influenza. The superior morality of married men prevents their often doing this sort of thing unless their wives are very good-natured indeed. Yet there be wives who are gentle enough to remember that man works hard and life is short, and one evening of boredom can never be reprieved, and they will sail into the greatest circle with the most unblushing effrontery, and with the saddest face tell the saddest story about poor Charles, or poor Reginald, who is totally unfit to come out—a story? no, it is true; for a man can not come out in the slippers and shooting-coat in which he is entertaining his college friend who has run up from his Devonshire curacy. But such wives are gems, and should be treasured like unto gems—nay, their price is far above carbuncles.

As he walked off to Lincoln's Inn Fields Charley Launceston remembered that he had two things to say—one was to tell the other fellows not to mention that he had dined there, the other to tell Mangles about Mr. Conway. He did both.

"Nothing surprises me, you know, Charley," said Mangles, drawing his friend to the mantle-



HER FATHER.

piece, "after the Wigram business. It was so wrong to her," he added, indicating the photograph of Magdalen in her bridal dress, which portrait he faithfully retained over his fire-place.

"Yes, it was wrong; but it is hard to be sorry for any thing that was disagreeable to Wigram."

"Who thinks of him? I believe, by-the-way, that he is a worse fellow than any of us thought. I don't want to talk before these chaps; but you stay them out, and I'll tell you something that will make your hair curl."

"I don't care much about that," said Launceston, aloud, "because curly hair wouldn't suit my countenance; but I'll do as you say. Rydon, you look pensive. Repent and reform. Doddy, pass me that sherry, that when you say your prayers to-night you may be able to reflect on one good action of the day."

So laughed Ernest Dormer's friends. But there was no smile on his own face just then, any more than in that of the sorrowful old man who had made his way to Ernest's room, and had found him leaning on a table, with his head in his hands, and so deep in thought of her that he did not hear the entrance of Her Father.

CHAPTER LX.

THE PACKET DELIVERED.

ERNEST DORMER had been engaged for some hours in inquiries which had taken him to various parts of the town, and which had not been entirely fruitless, though the result was very imperfect. He was weary, less in body than in mind—weary as he alone can be who, with a heart full to overflowing, has to struggle with petty and shifty details, and is not borne up by the conviction that, little by little, he is approaching his object. Yet he had learned something.

"Ernest," said Mr. Conway, gently, thinking that he was asleep.

"Mr. Conway!"

Dormer rose, and took the hand of his father-in-law. It was scarcely extended, yet could hardly be said to seem withheld.

"Does my visit surprise you?"

"It is welcome," said Ernest, as he placed a chair for Mr. Conway.

"I am glad to hear you say that—as far as I can be glad of any thing."

Startled at the words and the tone, Ernest looked hastily into the old man's face.

"You are not the bearer of bad news?" he asked, in a tremulous voice.

"I scarcely know what news I could bring that you would think bad, Dormer," replied Mr. Conway, coldly.

"No, you are not," gasped Ernest, relieved by the instinctive knowledge that it was not so Mr. Conway would have spoken had he had a dark message to tell.

"Why have you crushed our child, Ernest Dormer?" asked the father, simply. "You know how we loved her, you know how she deserved our love, and we thought that she had yours."

"And had she not?" replied Dormer, with energy.

"Why has it been taken away?"

"Who tells you that it has been taken away?"

"Yourself. How can you ask me that?"

"Because it is untrue. No human being has a right to say it. It is untrue, I repeat to you. I swear it."

"Then," said Mr. Conway, "in the name of God, what does all this mean? You suddenly abandon her—her, and the home where the only strife was how you should be made happiest—you neglect her letters—you break her heart—and you look me in the face and dare to say you love her. What base, bad secret is behind all this, Ernest Dormer? I am her father, and I will know."

"Her health—tell me of that," said Dormer, with compressed lips.

"I am here to tell you nothing, but to ask you why my child, your wife, is outraged and destroyed."

"You will not tell me how you left her?" said Ernest, almost humbly.

"Do you affect to care to know? Perhaps you do care," said Mr. Conway, bitterly. "Perhaps you may even find comfort in knowing that she was too ill to be made aware of my journey. That is so, Mr. Dormer. You need not take my words as a father's exaggeration. Mr. Beccles forbade my going to her bedside even to kiss her before I left her, perhaps forever. Is that confirmation enough for you—you who know the love that reigned in the household you have ruined?"

"Speak what bitter words you will," said Ernest. "Hereafter you may not think that it was right or just, but you think so now, and that is enough. Why have you left her, Mr. Conway? What is the value of any thing you could learn from me, what is the feeling that you have stunned me with your news, compared to a place by her bed, to watching every breath she draws?"

"And you can say this to me?"

"Yes—not in anger, believe that."

"Whose place should be by her bed?" asked Mr. Conway, striving to speak indignantly, but hindered by a gentler impulse; "whose eye should watch her, but yours? But for you such watching would have been needless, and yet you abandon her. Again I ask you, Dormer, what has she done?—what have you done?"

"She! Magdalen? Nothing."

"Then the crime, or the shame, or the sorrow is your own. Ernest," said Mr. Conway, "do not play with true hearts. We gave you our child in all faith and trust, and she has loved you dearly, and is dying for her love. What cursed spell is upon you? Are you in danger—in need—and do you want to be told that those who gave you Magdalen would give you their last earthly possession to save her husband?—have you done us the deep wrong to doubt that?"

"Take my hand," said Ernest Dormer, with agitation.

"You would not ask it if you were dishonored," said Mr. Conway, now clasping Dormer's hand, and holding it; "but are you in trouble? I am weaker than I thought I was, Ernest," he went on, the tears coming to his eyes, "but your voice brings back to me that I had learned to regard you as my son, and I am speaking as to an unkind son, rather than as to one whom I ought perhaps to learn to hate."

"It is not so, by the God that hears us," said Dormer, bending down to the ear of the father and speaking low, but with an earnestness that made Mr. Conway look up with a strange wonder.

"I can not lose my child, Ernest," he said, imploringly. "Speak to me, my dear Ernest—tell me all; or tell me nothing, if you will, except that I shall not lose my child."

"You shall not lose her," replied Ernest, scarcely knowing what he said. "This sorrow!—this separation!"

"They are killing her."

"They shall not. They were not my doing, but I will end them."

"You can, and you have never sought to do it! And you have had no thought for the pale face that grew sadder and sadder day by day, as you never came, never wrote. Ernest, you would have had no right to cause that misery even if you had been wronged; to heap it on that innocent girl, who lived only to make us all happy—but you have said that you will end it, and I promised her mother that I would not reproach you. When once you have seen that face I shall be glad to think I did not speak harshly."

"A word," said Ernest. "Why was I not told that my wife was ill?"

"She forbade my writing."

"That was not Magdalen," said Ernest.

"Was it not Magdalen, and have you not learned to know her yet? Do you mean that pride—an offended wife's pride—made her forbid it? You do know her too well."

"But she herself. I swear to you there was no word in her letters that should have shown me—"

"Her letters! Ernest, you took much heed of her letters," said Mr. Conway, with a quivering lip. He had resolved to control himself, but the mention of Magdalen's letters brought an angry flush to his cheek.

"Do you think so unworthily of me, Mr. Conway, as to believe that one line from Magdalen was unnoticed? I know that you do not."

"I did not," said Mr. Conway; "but that matters little now. I have but one care, and that is for her. I ask no explanations until they have been made to her, if it please God to let her hear earthly talk any more."

"You have said that thing twice," said Ernest, in a low voice, "and you are not one of those who speak wildly. Answer me as you would have done months back. Is Magdalen in danger? Say no!"

"You have judged me very strangely, Ernest Dormer," said Mr. Conway, "and but for my great sorrow I might tell you so in other words. Can I read your thought right? Do you believe that I am here with a sad story of my child, to lure a cold husband back to his home? Your question, after what I have said, sounds strangely like that."

"You know not the cruel wrong you do me; nor do I care for it now. It is so weighty a thing for me to have another day in London that I dare to ask you whether I dare take that day. If your answer is not yes, and without one second's hesitation, I fling aside all thoughts but one—how I can quickest reach her."

He said this rapidly, but as a man who means his every word.

"I refuse to make an answer that changes responsibility. I don't presume to judge of the weighty thing that should detain a husband from what may be his wife's dying bed."

"You have said it again."

"I will tell you what has happened. After sending away her last letter to you—it were waste of time to say what terror and sorrow came before that—your wife lighted upon a note which you received on our return from Scotland."

Ernest turned pale.

"I remember the note," said Mr. Conway. "It was read—she read it, Dormer, as some harmless matter. What it meant may have been better known to you, though you gave it into your wife's hands. By what means she was induced to read it again yesterday, and by what fatal light she read it, I know not; but she tottered into the parlor with that note in her hand; prayed us to take it, but not to tell her if there was any thing in it against you. And since that time she has spoken no articulate word."

"The telegraph—the telegraph!"

"Yes, I had thought of that; but you had not thought fit to give your address even to your wife, and I thought that the message might be neglected at the club, like the letters; therefore I left home, with that misery in it, that I might not treat her husband as cruelly as he has treated her, and leave him without knowledge of what he ought to know."

"All this is nothing now," said Ernest, hurriedly; "but you spoke of another sorrow and terror; what do you mean?"

"I will not speak of that. Things have been said which will not bear repetition; at least I will not repeat them. Magdalen had begged you to explain, but as you had not deigned even to send for her letter—"

"Mr. Conway, even you must not say that again. No day passes that I do not satisfy myself whether she has written or not."

"There is a proof to the contrary," said Mr. Conway, throwing down on the table the packet he had received from the club porter.

"This! I should have had it by this time—and it must have arrived by a late post to-day," said Ernest, tearing open the envelope.

He read the single line from Magdalen.

As his eye fell on the last word one kind, warm throb went right through his heart—a true husband's response to a wife's caress.

Then he opened the inclosure.

Mr. Conway's eyes were upon Dormer's face, and they saw it grow livid with a fury which once, perhaps, in a man's whole life may be pardoned, but which should scarcely be seen twice on a good man's features.

We will not write down the words that came hot from those white lips. Yet they were the words of a man justly maddened by a crime against one whom he loved.

Yes. He did not know it then, but even Mr. Conway, wronged, wounded, sorrowful, suddenly hearing that curse, and the tone in which it came forth, felt that it could have come from no man but one who was fearfully in earnest. In that crowning hour, and in that grim and vehement utterance, Ernest's heart spoke out. He loved her.

Then he rose, paced the room for a few minutes, and lastly came up to Mr. Conway.

"I told you I had a weighty thing that kept me in town, but that I would give it up for a word. Now but one word in the world should take me from town and from vengeance, and that is Magdalen. We will return to Naybury this night."

As they took their seats in the railway carriage Mr. Conway said:

"If you please, we will exchange no words on one subject until we are at home."

"I thank you," said Ernest. "You have spoken my wish."

What Mr. Conway had seen in the face of his son-in-law had made him wonder, but mingled with his wonder was a certain hopefulness, or at least a doubt whether he had not been judging Dormer too harshly. The packet conveyed to Ernest a sudden revelation, and therefore he could hardly have had any part in the transaction with which it was connected. So far he might be, probably was, exculpated as regarded Magdalen. Then Ernest's eagerness to rejoin her, and his abandonment of an object which he had declared to be so important, told favorably with Mr. Conway, who was willing to condone almost any offense save unkindness to his child. And as they traveled through the night Mr. Conway often watched the face of his son-in-law with a different feeling than, a few hours before, he would have deemed it possible for him to entertain for one who had caused him so much grief.

Ernest Dormer scarcely spoke, except to name some of the stations, and to count those that remained to be passed. The carriage was full, and he had to exert all his self-command to restrain a restlessness most unusual with him. He never seemed to think of rest, even to the extent of throwing himself back in his seat, but sat forward and straight up, as a man who is waiting to spring to his feet. Once, however, overpowered by the fatigue of the day and the monotony of railway noise, he closed his eyes for a few moments, and suddenly woke himself by an action that must have been prompted by his dream—he thrust forward a clenched hand. After that he slumbered no more.

It was gray dawn when they reached the Naybury station, where no passengers but themselves alighted.

Mr. Saunders, the station-master, was there to receive them.

"I left you rather hastily the last time, Mr. Saunders," said Ernest, "but it was very important to me to catch the train. Mrs. Dormer has been regularly scolding me by every day's post since for being so fool-hardy. I beg your pardon, and now I am going home to beg hers."

Mr. Saunders wanted them to wait while he roused an hostler hard by and got them a fly, but Mr. Conway said,

"I would rather walk up to the house, if you don't mind, Ernest."

"I should prefer it," said Dormer. "Take my arm," he added, in a lower voice.

Mr. Conway understood, and complied with the hint, and at the turn of the road Ernest released him.

"All Naybury will hear of our return," said Ernest; "and that gossip Saunders may as well be able to say something more."

"It was thoughtful."

"We must all be thoughtful now, Mr. Conway. I hope I have schooled myself, but I shall need all your best aid. But first of all, where are we going? Surely it will not do to run the risk of waking up the house."

"There will not be much risk," said Mr. Conway. "Anne sleeps on the ground-floor now."

"That is a new arrangement."

"It was her own wish," said Mr. Conway, evading explanation; the truth being that this was part of the faithful Anne's plans for garrisoning the house against all comers. Call who might, she would be at hand.

"I would rather knock up Mr. Beccles; and he would give us later, or rather, more certain news than she could."

"Well, as you will."

As they walked along the road, the light growing stronger and the objects becoming defined against the sky, Mr. Conway said:

"I do not know when I have been out at such an hour, Ernest."

"The fault is mine. I ought to have remembered your journey in the daytime, and have asked you to remain at the hotel for the night. Frankly, I never thought of it. And if I had I suppose that you would have refused."

"There is no fault, Ernest. I am a bit of a dreamer, and I see coincidences which are perhaps none at all. The dawn put something into my recollection—something that passed between your mother and me. If—if things go well, I may tell you."

"Give me Magdalen, and things *shall* go well," said Ernest Dormer, stopping for a moment, and pressing his hand on the arm of his companion.

They went on until they reached the beginning of Naybury Street. All was silent and still, and the noise of their own footsteps appeared strangely loud. Weary, too, as were both men, the intense quiet of the hour was not welcome—it seemed to invite them to a kindred repose which neither desired. It was a small matter, scarce worth note, but that they noted it in silence, and remembered it in other days.

Turning to the right they ascended a lane, near the end of which was the snug little house of the doctor, Mr. Beccles. He was a widower, and meant to remain one; but by causing it to be believed that he intended to marry again he gained many advantages and much popularity in Naybury and around it. He was a skillful man and a kindly, except when he came into contact with the guardians of the Naybury poor, and then he became very bellicose. They were his employers, too, and what had he to do with their shortcomings, and neglect, and meanness?

a question which the hard-fisted authorities frequently asked of one another, but scarcely dared hint to their fiery official. He would have been dismissed, or snubbed into dismissing himself, but the guardians were literally afraid of him and his tongue. It is well for the poor, however, when their medical friend can afford to fight their battles so recklessly. But the poor showed him no consideration in return, and had no hesitation in dragging the union doctor from his bed at all hours when his rounds might just as well have been waited for. It happened that a case of the kind had occurred that night, and Mr. Beccles, who had been forced to take a six-mile ride by an absurd panic of a stalwart laborer, had returned by no means in a good temper, and was undressing again when Dormer's ring at the night-bell came.

The doctor remarked that the ringer might ring, and also gave him another permission, to the granting which Mr. Beccles's authority might not have been thought adequate. He would not go out again before breakfast for any body.

The ring was repeated with vigor, and it occurred to Mr. Beccles that the disturber would be the better for as vigorous a remonstrance. Which, opening his window, he prepared to tender; but instantly recognizing Mr. Conway, he exclaimed:

"Not worse, surely?"

In half a minute the robust, bright-eyed, quick-tongued doctor was with them, wrapped in a huge coat, and ready to set out on the instant at need. But on explanation he was greatly relieved, for he had a strong personal affection for Magdalen.

"Mr. Dormer, I am more glad to see you than I can say."

"But that means—I hope it does not mean—"

"No, no, I mean that it is you who are wanted. Your presence is worth a hundred doctors."

"What is her latest state?" asked Ernest, struggling against all thoughts of the past, and against the self-reproaches called up by the speech, and resolutely setting him to deal with the present.

"There is no change. I should rejoice to tell you that there was improvement; but I never say these things without truth, except when to tell a person that he is improving improves him."

"I may see her? I must."

"May you?—I echo you—you must."

"But she must be prepared in some way," said Mr. Conway. "You would not have Ernest go suddenly into the room."

"Come into the house, can't you?" was Mr. Beccles's reply. And he led the way into his surgery. It was still hot with the gas which he had just extinguished, and the sensation was not unwelcome to Mr. Conway, who was chill from his journey. Ernest, on the contrary, felt a sudden depression at having thrust upon him the suggestions of danger and of medical vigilance in connection with the home which he had left so cheerful. He knew all that must have occurred; he had thought half the night of the darkened room, the careful footfalls, the whispered words; but the surgery brought it all upon him in the hardest and most repulsive way—the nerves again, of course, but such things are.

"I have been out on a fool's errand," said Mr. Beccles, again lighting the gas, though the morning streamed through the shutter holes. "But I have taught a man to send for me when nothing is the matter. He'll remember it, I'll bet," added the doctor, looking with a revengeful complacency at an empty vial, whence it might be assumed that he had administered some potent remedy. "Sit down, can't you?"

"We will not keep you up; I have asked the only question I wanted to ask," said Ernest.

"Keep me up—what do I care? What are you going to do?"

"To go up to the house, of course," said Mr. Conway.

"Of course, at this time in the morning. You must do nothing of the sort."

"I will do nothing against your advice, Mr. Beccles," said Ernest Dormer. "That would be madness. But I should be glad if you would let me say what I wish to do."

"Go on."

"I take it for granted that you know that my absence has had much to do with Mrs. Dormer's illness."

"More than I choose to say; but you invite the answer."

"Let no one spare me," said Dormer, with earnestness. "At least I will not spare myself. Does Mr. Beccles know," he said, turning to Mr. Conway, "that I have caused grief to Magdalen, and that at this moment she may receive me with displeasure? If not, I tell him so."

"I have gathered that there were differences," said Mr. Beccles. "I could hardly help doing that. Mr. Conway has told me next to nothing. I wanted no telling in the presence of what I saw."

"Life and death may be in question," said Ernest Dormer, "and you must fully understand to be able to advise me. There have been no differences, in the ordinary sense of the word, but my wife has reason to believe that I have behaved cruelly to her—I am ashamed of stopping even to say that my actions have not been voluntary—and she would have a right to refuse to see me."

"I listen," said Mr. Beccles, "and I hear a true man speak."

"Yes, I may hope that. Now, Mr. Beccles, I have been thinking over this all night, and in what way it would be safest for that dear woman that I should first approach her. I have my own wish."

"You know her heart, Mr. Dormer."

"You mean that such knowledge is likely to guide me aright."

"Without going so far as that," said the doctor, "I may say that any idea of yours will deserve attention."

Ernest Dormer then told him how he proposed that Magdalen and he should meet again.

Before the doctor could speak Mr. Conway said,

"If Beccles permits it, no way could seem so gentle and so fitting."

Mr. Beccles had much to say, and they conversed long and earnestly, and before they had ceased Naybury was astir, and there was no longer a question of disturbing the household. At length the doctor said:

"Were Mrs. Dormer but a little more advanced toward recovery I believe that I should prohibit this. As matters stand, I do not say that you will be wrong."

When he spoke thus Mr. Conway knew that they need talk no longer.

"I will not leave Naybury, Conway," said Mr. Beccles, "if the entire union were roaring for me. I will come to you at a moment's notice, and if you do not send for me I will come at nine."

So he dismissed them from the heated surgery, and into the bright and shining morning.

Up the hill, and into the garden, and in at the hall-door, then open, and near which a servant was engaged in her duties.

A sign from Mr. Conway bade her keep silence, but the girl's honest round face crimsoned with pleasure when she saw Dormer; for all in the house loved Magdalen, and the women had instinctively known his coming to be the one thing their young mistress had desired.

"It will be for my mother to say whether she will see me at once," said Ernest to Mr. Conway. "It may be better for you to obtain her consent to my plan, and then to come down to me. Shall I wait in the garden?"

"At all events I will see her," said Mr. Conway. "She will be wearied with her watching, and may have fallen asleep."

It was a man that spoke—a kind and loving father, too. But he spoke as a man. Asleep! Mrs. Conway was on guard beside Magdalen's bed, and had heard her husband's footstep on the stair, and though he trod lightly she knew who was coming. She glided from the room, and was in his arms.

"Returned already, dear?"

"Yes, I traveled all night."

"Oh, how wrong! but you had a reason," said Mrs. Conway, turning pale. "You have not bad news?"

"No, the best I could bring. I have brought *him*."

"Ernest?"

"Yes—he is below—in the garden—and caring only for one thing in the world—to see her."

"Let me cry," said Mrs. Conway, "let me cry, dear. It is not sorrow, you know that; let me cry."

It was a rain-flood that poured from those affectionate eyes, but it was soon past, and Mrs. Conway hurried into the garden, followed by her husband.

Ernest advanced to meet her, uncertain as to his reception. He needed not to be, nor was he uncertain long, for the arms of Magdalen's mother were round his neck, and her kisses on his cheek.

"Half the battle is won, dear," was all she said to him.

Then they walked with her, and told her what Ernest desired, and of the long consultation with Mr. Beccles and of his sanction to the plan, and they asked her for her assent. And then she asked for a few minutes of thought alone. She returned to the house.

The men spoke little to one another as they traversed the garden. They felt that a trial-hour was at hand, but they had thought over all things, and the trial must come. They had taken counsel for the best, as they believed. And they became impatient for the return of Mrs. Conway.

They should not have been impatient. Her time was being well bestowed. Her husband knew how, but the thought did not come to Ernest Dormer. He believed that she was watching by the bed of Magdalen.

It was so, but she was praying a loving mother's prayer for her child. Some think *that* prayer is at least heard, whatever vain, selfish, foolish petitions are mercifully lost in air.

When she rejoined them it was only to say, holding a hand of each,

"Come, Ernest."

And so, led by her mother, came softly into Magdalen's darkened room the husband of her love. She saw him not, heard him not. She lay with the sweet face upturned, the eyes were closed—he knew not whether in sleep or in unconsciousness. The rich chestnut hair had rolled in volumes on the pillow. One hand lay across her bosom, the other near the edge of the couch. She was very pale—paler than he had ever seen her, and the features had lost somewhat of their roundness; yet he saw not, or sought to persuade himself that he did not see, the signs of trouble or of suffering. The lips were slightly parted, and Ernest fancied that they sometimes sought to frame a word. He stood for a few moments to gaze, and satisfy himself that he should not startle her. Then her mother, pressing his hand kindly, pointed to the vacant chair by the pillow and withdrew.

Then came a faith to Ernest Dormer which he told to few, but which he never abandoned.

Magdalen was unconscious of his approach, unconscious of all. But he drew near to her bed, and kneeling down he gently took the hand that rested on her heart.

"My own Magdalen," he said, but it was to himself. Had she been waking she had not heard that whisper.

But across her beautiful face came that strange and pleasant little frown of surprise and bewilderment, and then it was followed by a smile, far, far less radiant than that which in her happy days chased the little cloud and lighted up the whole face, but a smile that spoke of a sudden happiness. Yet she uttered

no sound, and made not the faintest return to the pressure of her husband's hand.

He believed she knew that they had met again.

CHAPTER LXI.

A CERTAIN PHOTOGRAPH REAPPEARS.

VERY little time elapsed before the return of Ernest Dormer to his home was known throughout Naybury. Mr. Saunders, the station-master, had a large circle of friends and acquaintances, and he was a kind of Power among them. He was so prompt, so loud-voiced, so administrative. He was a man of resource, and the rapidity of his conceptions startled the slow provincial minds of his subordinates. He had come from some important station on one of the great lines, and had condescended to our obscure Naybury, and he said that the change had been made necessary by his health, but some whom he had snubbed hinted at dark rumors of rudeness to a muffled director, who revealed himself in wrath upon a platform, and whose vengeance had driven Mr. Saunders from the more important station. But his friends disbelieved this. Mr. Saunders could tell of interviews with the greatest among us, of civilities from princes of the blood, mighty statesmen, terrible soldiers; and he had a collection of photographs of notables, which he implied rather than said had been presented to him by the illustrious originals in sign of their recognition of his able and thoughtful conduct at the great station. Here again his enemies were skeptical, remarked upon the fact that the likenesses were nearly all by the same provincial artist, and suggested that it was curious that this person should be so largely employed by the great. But such small, carping, Colenso criticism was treated with lofty scorn by the believers in Mr. Saunders.

He speedily apprised his own circle of the return of Mr. Dormer with his father-in-law. He stated that he had immediately called Mr. Dormer to account for his breach of the railway regulations when he last went to town, regulations which might have been violated in the time of Mr. Saunders's predecessor, he said, and which might be violated in the time of his successor, but which should be rigidly observed while he himself had the station. That Mr. Dormer had offered a handsome and proper apology, and there the matter should end, especially as there was illness in his family. Mr. Saunders's conduct and magnanimity having been duly applauded, he became gentle, but a little mysterious, and observed that Mr. Conway and Mr. Dormer were apparently the best friends in the world. Asked whether he laid any stress on the word apparently, he replied that it was no part of his business to account for his language, so long as it was consistent with his duty; but he restored the abashed questioner to favor by the affable remark that as a man of the world he must be aware that every thing did not lie on the outside.

The news spread, and by noon few persons who interested themselves in their neighbors' affairs were unaware that Mr. Ernest Dormer was at home. Perhaps the person to whom the tidings gave the most unalloyed satisfaction was Miss Fanny Buxton. That naughty girl actually danced with joy, and could scarcely preserve a decorous step as she hastened to pretty Mrs. Fanshaw with the information. Doubtless they both were exceedingly glad for the sake of their friend Mrs. Dormer, but the cup of their gladness foamed and sparkled and ran over at the thought of the discomfiture of their friend Mrs. Cutcheon. The circumstantial story of the law papers delivered through the window, and of the citation from the Divorce Court, the tale which had enabled her to rebuke Phœbe and crush Fanny, all blown to the winds, and Mr. Dormer at home with his wife. The only question was how to make the most of their victory. It must be proclaimed in full divan. Dorcas must have a special sitting. They must enlist Phœbe, and get her to work upon the President's sense of justice: It was delightful.

Mr. Chervil was, of course, an early recipient of the news, and it pleased him much. It pleased him more to have the opportunity of imparting it to Mrs. De Gully, with improvements and additions, to the effect that Mr. Dormer was about to take legal proceedings against several persons who had been propagating libels and slanders, and that he had got, Mr. Chervil had heard, a clew to the persons who had concocted a letter of much malice. Mr. Chervil, of course, hoped that Mr. Dormer would be wise, and let things be quietly forgotten; but these London gentlemen were hasty, and he feared that there would be unpleasantness in the place. To be just, it should be said that Mrs. De Gully was not in the least frightened, but that in reviewing her own share in a certain transaction the lady felt that she had been driven by force of circumstances into acts which a lady should not have done. Her vague original idea of letting the delivery of the packet be supposed to be Francine's unauthorized doing became ridiculous to her the moment it was brought to a practical test, and Mrs. De Gully was exceedingly angry with herself, and a great deal more angry with her brother for imposing such conditions, instead of supplying her with money, and letting her alone. She determined to consult Mr. Bulliman as to what could be done to her. Had it been a case of ordinary obligation which had been neglected Mrs. De Gully's experiences had enlightened her as to the hard ways of the law and of the world; but Mr. Chervil thoughtfully dropped the word conspiracy, and the poor lady had visions of being dragged from Martletowers in the night and committed to prison by Lord Mazagon and Sir Richard Salvington, magistrates.

Edward Grafton heard of it, and received the news with a certain relief. As regarded

himself, it was not impossible that he might speedily be brought into collision with Mr. Dormer, who might consider that Grafton's profession not only ought not to screen him from chastisement for his conduct to Magdalen, but ought to be thought an aggravation of it. But Edward, though morally a coward, was not physically one, and his apprehension of Dormer's vengeance occupied him but little. He had been full of remorse for the revelations he had made to Magdalen and for the language he had used, and he derived a certain consolation from the thought that Ernest's return must have brought consolation to his wife. This was one of the occasional gleams of a nobler nature than Edward Grafton habitually manifested, and he weakly comforted himself at times with the thought that had he been differently circumstanced a man who could feel in that way would have been a better man. It is to be hoped that he put more wholesome teaching into the sermons he addressed to the clowns of Saxbury.

Mrs. Faunt heard of it, and was enabled to take the news with her to London. It occurred to that respected female that just at the present time her interests were not likely to be much promoted by residence at Trafalgar, and she had some business in town which might as well be attended to. Mr. Edward Grafton had recently paid her money, and might not be inclined, after their last interview, to be in a hurry to renew his payment. She was out of favor at the Rectory since the conduct that had brought down on her the thunders of the Church; and, moreover, the Rectory had long ceased to give the dinners that had made her counsels useful; so that there was no probability of forgiveness. So she went to London.

One of her earliest visits was to the poor little egg-forger, Lucy, whom Mrs. Faunt found engaged at her work, but with a languid air, and looking altogether disheartened, and careless of what she was about.

Mrs. Faunt had been very ill received, and deservedly, in that house, upon former visits, and she had prepared an artful and deprecating manner with which to smooth her way. But Lucy now appeared perfectly indifferent as to the character of her visitor or of her errand, and desired Mrs. Faunt to sit down, if she liked; adding, that it cost no more to sit down than to stand up—one of the little vulgarisms which the girl used to cultivate in old days for the amusement of one who, detesting vulgarity, laughed at it in Lucy—a sign which, poor child, she had not known how to read. But she got some light upon it when Ernest Dormer showed dislike of her talk under that colonnade.

"No more it does, my dear," said Mrs. Faunt, taking a seat; "and I like to hear a bit of a joke, if it's ever so small, for there's little enough where I come from."

"There'll be less where you are going to," said Lucy, rudely and uncharitably.

"Ah, you don't mean those things, my dear, and I don't mind 'em from you."

"Who do you mind 'em from?" demanded Lucy. "Because, whoever it is, you had better go and ask for some more. You are a very bad old woman, Mrs. Faunt, that's one thing; and another is, that you are altering very fast, and breaking up, and if you don't think so yourself, just look into that glass."

"Now don't speak so, my dear, because though I know you don't mean it, I can't say that I altogether like it."

"Well, there's a short way of getting rid of it. There's no charge for going out, Mrs. Faunt."

"It isn't like you to be hard on an old woman, my dear; and something must have vexed you."

"Nothing vexes me."

"Well, that's well, and we ought to be very thankful when we've come to that state in which we can't be vexed."

"Thankful to who?"

"Why—thankful—inasmuch—I only spoke in a general way, and using a general word, my dear; don't be so sharp."

Lucy actually laughed. She had talked to *him* two or three times in her objectionable life in a way which was not altogether so objectionable, only that two people who knew enough to speak as they had done ought to have known better than to live as they did. The old heathen's floundering awoke Lucy's sense of humor (a sense which in all of us, it may be observed, lies very near our appreciation of unworldly things), and she answered:

"Out of your line, Mrs. Faunt, out of your line. You've got a good many tons of repentance to get through before you begin to talk about thankfulness."

"Now it's odd you should say that about repenting, my dear," said Mrs. Faunt, with a smile. "Quite odd!"

"Is it?—why?"

"Because it's just what I've been reading as I came along in the 'bus. A lady—she was quite a lady, real velvet and gloves of the best—she gave me a tract, all about that."

"Very right in her; she saw you were an old sinner, and not likely to last long. I hope you mean to profit by it."

"My dear, I shall be glad to profit by any thing. You could not give an old woman a glass of sherry, could you?"

"I dare say I could; but what's the sense of asking me for sherry? Of course you mean brandy, and I haven't got any in the house."

"And couldn't that nice-looking girl," said Mrs. Faunt, with a wheedling smile, "couldn't she just—"

"No, she just couldn't," said Lucy, sharply. "I don't send her to the public house for spirits."

"I'll take the sherry," said Mrs. Faunt, with a resigned and patient look. "But it is unwise in you, very unwise, my dear."

"I know that; but when a woman asks for a glass of wine one doesn't like to say no," said Lucy, going to a closet.

"That's not my meaning, my dear. But in case of illness in the night, or so, it's wrong not to have something by you. Take my advice, and get some in, and let it be of the best, and you may live to thank me for telling you to do it."

"The idea of any woman thanking you, Mrs. Faunt, for any thing you ever told her to do!" said Lucy, contemptuously, and at the same time giving her guest a glass of wine, which, tendered with such words, many persons might have thrown on the floor. Not so Mrs. Faunt, who smiled a health to Lucy, and drank the wine with as much apparent pleasure as if it had been presented by an affectionate child.

"Very right sort of stuff that, my dear. A thought timid, as I may say, and not likely to do any harm, but quite pleasant. I must give you something in return, and I will give you my tract, as your thoughts seem to have taken that line, and much credit it does you."

"I don't want your tract."

"But you shouldn't be proud," said Mrs. Faunt, pulling out a bundle of miscellaneous papers from a capacious pocket. "Pride killed the angels, I've heard," she went on, searching through the batch with some awkwardness, and making bad shots. "I don't flatter you into an angel, my dear"—and here she took a paper between her teeth that it might be out of the way—"but the moral is the same," she mumbled, "and you might—"

"What are you mumbling about?" said Lucy. "Put down your rubbish, can't you? I don't want your tract, I tell you."

"Pride killed the—devil take it!" cried Mrs. Faunt, opening her mouth in a rage as her papers fell down from her knees. "There's a precious muddle."

"Yes, and I know where there's another," said Lucy, frankly. "No wonder you didn't care for my sherry. I thought you had been comforting yourself before you came."

"Nothing to speak of, my dear," said Mrs. Faunt, stooping with some difficulty, and painfully collecting her odd-looking documents. "When I was your age I would have been more good-natured, and helped an old creature that can hardly move for the lumbago."

"I am not covetous to touch any of your papers, Mrs. Faunt. There, you've left something on the ground now," said Lucy, pointing with her foot. "Oh, it's a picture—have you been having yourself taken as a warning to society? No," she continued, picking up the card, "it's a photograph of a tombstone. Come, that's very right. Carry that about with you, and look at it ten times a day, or let us say whenever you take something to drink, which will be oftener."

"Let's see," said Mrs. Faunt, entirely neglecting the rest of the speech. "Yes, that's a very curious picture, and there's a very curious story belonging to it, and a story that shall make somebody shiver in his shoes before I'm done with him."

"And what's the fun of a man's shivering in his shoes?"

"We shall see about that," said Mrs. Faunt. "We shall see. A trick's a trick, but we shall see who gets the last trick."

Lucy laughed out.

"I shouldn't care about a game at cards with tombstones on them," she said; and then she thought how some one would have laughed at her pertness, and then she did not even smile.

"You're talking nonsense," said Mrs. Faunt, whom certain recollections just then irritated out of her assiduous civility. "Game at cards, indeed. No. But let him who gave me that look to himself."

"Well, I don't want to be bothered about him," said Lucy. "I see," she added, giving another look at the picture, "it is a tombstone that is going to be stuck up."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Mrs. Faunt. "Going to be stuck up? How do you know that?"

"Because I've got eyes, and because I've been in the habit of drawing, and because I know one thing from another."

"But I say," said Mrs. Faunt. It was true, as Lucy surmised, that the excellent woman had refreshed herself, but only to the point at which a second thought is required for the comprehension of a speech. "What was you talking about?"

"Why, this thing," said Lucy. "Come, you had better go away; you'll get no more sherry, and I advise you to go home."

"And will you tell me what you mean?" said Mrs. Faunt, across whose brain there began to crawl a thought that in some way or other she had been deceived, but she could not tell how. "What do you mean?" she repeated, laying hold of Lucy's arm.

The latter angrily forced her arm from the old woman's hold, and bade her keep her hands off.

"Never mind about that," said Mrs. Faunt, too much in earnest to notice the meaning of the indignant gesture. "Look at that, and tell me if it is not a picture of a tombstone in Highgate Cemetery. That's where he told me she was buried."

"Very likely she is, whoever she is," said Lucy. "But it does not want half an eye to see that the tombstone here is not taken from a real tomb, but from a sketch, and not a very good one."

"Stop—say that again."

Lucy repeated it, with a raised voice, and some temper in it.

"Then," said Mrs. Faunt, also raising her voice, "you dare to tell me that she isn't dead and buried, and that's not her grave?"

"What are you storming at me for, you old fool?" retorted Lucy, using great plainness of speech. "What do I know or care about her, or him, or you, or that either?"

And she cast the photograph at Mrs. Faunt's feet.

"But he said she was dead," said that person, slowly.

"Perhaps she is. More likely that she isn't, and that you have tumbled into some dirty pit that you have been digging for somebody else. I hope you have. There's nothing in that picture to show that any body is dead—do you understand?—but it looks as if somebody wanted to make you think so, and had a tombstone drawn, and then photographed. It could be done for a few shillings; and I rather think you are done, also, Mrs. Faunt, for you stare like a stuck pig."

"And I've been carrying that about with me, and he has been sitting at home grinning," murmured Mrs. Faunt, in a tone that betokened no good to the subject of her speculations. "But you say truly, my dear, she might be dead!"

"Yes, and so might somebody else, and the world none the worse."

"I'm obliged to you, my dear. I'm obliged for several things. We won't speak of the sherry, because that was not much; and if you had been ruled by me, you would have a cellar of your own that a baronet might have paid for and drunk of. But I'm obliged to you for your finding out this trick, though you didn't mean it, and didn't tell me of it in any friendly intent, as I may say. Likewise for all your good wishes for my latter end. In return for which, as you refuse the good lady's tract, and mean to repent your own way, which every body has a right to, I am pleased to inform you that a certain friend of yours has gone back to his wife at Naybury, and has been received to her arms, and they mean to live happy ever afterward. You don't seem to like that news, my dear, but I can't stop to comfort you, because I am going up to Highgate to see with my own eyes; and good-day to you. Such ringing of bells to welcome him home—it was like a second wedding. Bless you, my dear, and once more good-day."

"Sara would not let us come in while that lady was here, mamma," said Mopes, who was followed into the studio by the excited Dormouse.

"I hate Sara," added the latter, who now spoke more articulately than when we first made her acquaintance, but who did not turn her oratorical powers to a better account.

"No, you don't, child," said her sister, sharply.

"I am not a child," said the Dormouse, preparing a roar, but she postponed it, being caught into her mother's arms, and kissed passionately.

Both children were surprised; for Lucy, though ever kind and even tender to them, had of late made little demonstration of her affection, and had let them come and go with slight notice of their presence.

"Have I been naughty, mamma?" said Mopes. "I did not mean. I am very sorry."

"Naughty, my darling? no," said Lucy, throwing an arm round her, and pressing the child's fair, soft cheek against her own.

"But you cuddled the Mouse, and took no notice of me, mamma, and I *am* the eldest, you know, and I have loved you longer than her."

"No you has not," promptly returned the Dormouse.

"You must both love me very much, darlings," said Lucy, "for I have nobody in the world but you."

"And Sara," said the Dormouse. "Oh, and Colonel Walter."

"Be quiet, child," said Mopes. "Mamma," she whispered, "I want to ask you something."

"You sha'n't whisper," said the Mouse, trying to push her sister from the mother's ear.

"Let her, darling, and you shall whisper next. What is it, love?"

"Wouldn't papa make it up, after all, and you kissing his hand?"

"You will not see him again, love."

"What, never?"

"Not for many years. Perhaps, when poor mamma is dead, and laid away down in the ground, and the flowers are growing over her."

"Then I will never speak to him," said the child, bursting into a wild cry; "and never give me that gold money instead of that I gave you for a prize, mamma, for I won't have it. He is wicked and cruel not to forgive when you beg his pardon, and God won't love him for it."

"No, he won't," added the Dormouse, solemnly.

But Ernest Dormer was not then thinking of how two poor little hearts that he had taught to love him—and a third that had needed no teaching—were beating together for his sake, and that tears were falling there, and for him.

Meantime Mrs. Faunt was on her way to Highgate. From the west of London the road is long, and before she reached the place the jolting exercise of the journey had completely neutralized the effect of her morning potations, and had left her a resolute and spleenful old person. And by the time that Mrs. Faunt, having toiled up the hill, had entered the gate, and begun to survey the work that she had undertaken, she came to a sort of conviction that she was a fool for her pains.

"Why, there's thousands," she said, "and I might walk for a year, and miss it after all. But he told me that day when he gave me the picture that I might go to the cemetery and look until I found the tombstone. Where's the beastly card? That was a triumph over me, Mrs. Verner; but I think you got something back, and perhaps it's delighting you now, m'm. Now then."

People have gone with all sorts of feelings to burials and burial-grounds. Grief and greed have perhaps stood together spelling out a tombstone inscription. Love has taken its last look at the last home of the loved, and hate has smiled that its enemy was harmless, or scowled that it could strike him no more. The heir has looked not ungratefully at the name of one who has yielded him the world's good things, the orphans have gazed piteously at the stone that hid him who had been their only protection. Faith has thrown her calm gaze upon the grave, and then raised her eyes from what was

for her but the portal; doubt has come with a sad silence, and unbelief with a sullen smile, at the tomb that means the end of all.

For some of these passions, some of these sentiments, there is reverence; and toleration for the rest, for it is not in the presence of the dead that man should judge the living.

But the most reverent and the most tolerant could have nothing but ridicule and wrath for the dreadful old creature who was rushing hither and thither among the tombs, with the picture in her hand, trying to discover an original. She was heavy-footed now, and many a time Charity Faunt stumbled, and the evil old woman breathed aught but a kindly wish at the stone that had tripped her. Yet she clove to her work for some time with the pertinacity of her stronger days. Many a long row of memorials passed under her review; several times she believed that she had come to what she sought, and then she read a name that she knew not, and read it with an angry word or worse. All was in vain. Weary and beaten, but deadly vicious in thought and will, she sank down upon the grave of a little child.

"It is not allowed to sit upon the graves," said a decent-looking man who came up.

"Who don't allow it?" answered Mrs. Faunt, looking up insolently at him.

"It is against the rule," said the man, irritated at her look and manner. "Persons who have a proper respect for the dead don't need warning."

"Who's to move me, if I don't choose to stir?"

"Well, you're an awkward lot to look at, but I think the job might be done. Any how, we'll ask at the office."

And he was walking away, when his last word caught her attention.

"There, my good man, I did not mean to speak rude, but I am so frightful tired with hunting for a friend's grave, and I had that moment rested, that I was angry at being driven off as if I was doing any harm. The dear babe below won't be disturbed in his sleep because a poor old woman has had a rest on his grave."

She said this with such apparent honesty that the man was at once touched.

"It was me that spoke rough, m'm," he said; "but it's my duty to see that the rules are obeyed, and sometimes we have very queer folks to deal with."

"You are quite right. What was you saying about the office?"

Of course in a short time Mrs. Faunt had ascertained that in the year mentioned on the pretended tombstone no person of the name which it bore had been buried in that cemetery.

That day she had done nearly enough. She felt that if she now went to visit Mr. Dudley, as was her intention, she should do herself no justice at all. She was too feeble for a fight, and she must have some refreshment, which in her signification of the word was rather more than enough to unfit her for any wit-combat. It would be going against too heavy odds.

So Mrs. Faunt more prudently resolved to recruit nature, and could perfectly well rely on herself for not being at all more forgiving in the morning than she was overnight. Absence of confidence in this respect frequently drives far better people than this old woman into frays in which they do not get the best. Husbands, it is said, greatly fear the softening influence of slumber, and therefore, hasting to have matters out while wrath is hot, are defeated with slaughter. Wives are alleged to make the mistake more seldom, and, advancing to the attack with coolness, especially after family prayers, win Solferinos and Sadowas.

Next morning, however, when Mr. Dudley was taking his after-breakfast pipe, Mrs. Faunt was announced—that is to say, the medical gentleman was informed that a lady wanted him.

Yes—for one half second Benjamin Dudley believed—it is difficult to write down gravely so mad a dream, but remember that we know Magdalen Dormer, and he never saw her—he believed that she had come up to see him in consequence of his dispatch. And his heart swelled with pride.

The next moment he was confronted by Mrs. Faunt.

Now the real marvel was that in the rage produced by the sudden revulsion of feeling Mr. Dudley did not forget his manliness, yield to his demonstrative nature, and beat Mrs. Faunt out of the place, as Master Brook served the Woman of Brentford. The marvel is explained by the fact that he was too much astonished to do any thing, or to say any thing more than this:

"She told me a lady."

"That speech is very rude, my dear Mr. Dudley, but you did not mean it, I know."

"What do you want?"

"That is hardly civiler. But if you will let me come into the parlor I will try to tell you what I want."

"I didn't think I should ever see you again," said Dudley. "We parted with a row, and you went away raging and threatening, and there I supposed was an end of every thing."

"My rage did you no harm, and my threats have not been acted on, Benjamin, I think."

"I can't say. They have done me no harm, that I know of."

"You put me into a fury, I recollect, and gave me too much to drink, so it stands to reason that a woman should be riotous. But if you bear no malice I bear none. What do you say?"

"I say that you want something out of me, and that you won't get it. But I bear no malice, particularly. At least if you don't annoy me."

"All right, Benjamin. Well, I do want something of you, certainly, but it will cost you nothing."

"Those are the things that always cost most. What is it?"

"Well, I never thought to come to it, but the truth is, I am getting old. Don't make any coarse remarks, because you will be old your-

self, if you live long enough. I am tired of the sort of life I have been leading, for if it's fun to-day it's none to-morrow. I have not saved any money, but there are two or three people who will give me some now and then."

"For the love they have for you?" asked Dudley, as she paused, for she had not quite shaped out the lie she meditated.

"Love or hate, what does it signify? It makes me feel as if I had got money in a good investment; and so I have. Investing in a person's love or hate is a new sort of stocks, Benjamin, isn't it? While they last, says you. Well, mine will last me out, I dare say. But whether or not, I want to have a quiet sort of home. I suppose you would not like me to come and live here as your housekepeer?"

"No," said Mr. Dudley, "I don't think I should."

"No, and I don't think London air would suit me; but I thought it acting right by an old friend to give him the refusal. The notion I have is to be got into some sort of asylum."

"Hanwell, or Colney Hatch?"

"Don't mock at me, Benjamin. I'm getting old, I tell you, and I want a home. There are several places where I could get in if I only had what I want you to put me in the way of getting."

"A character, I suppose?"

"Yes, something in that way. What do you call it when a parson and a doctor and a lot sign their names to a paper saying that you are every thing in the world that's right and square, and if you have a fault it's the being too good. I ought to know—many a time I've helped to forge 'em."

"Testimonials. Why not forge 'em now, if you're not ashamed of such work?"

"You are, I suppose, Benjamin?" said Mrs. Faunt, with a dash of insolence in her voice; but she had determined to make friends with him, and she struggled against her temper. "And quite right too, now that you can get on by your talents. I only wish I saw you getting on better."

"Never mind me. I'm content."

"You don't look it. Your eyes are as restless as fire, and you seem as if you have had a deal of trouble."

"Never mind me, I tell you. By Jove! your plan's not a bad one, and if you could be helped, as you say, into some quiet place, where nobody knew you, it would be as good a way of finishing your days as I know. But the devil and all is, that a sort of testimonials are wanted that you, my old Charity, could not get. Nor could I get them for you."

"Why not?"

"Because they must be proofs of good character. Hang it!" said Dudley, "you know that as well as I do; and what's the use of telling me this bosh? You've as much thought of going into an alms-house or an asylum as I have. Come, play out."

"Of course I can't make you believe if you won't."

"Well, I won't."

"It's very hard. I get more sympathy from strangers than from an old friend whom I have served, or tried to serve, in my time."

"Naturally, Charity," laughed Dudley; "the strangers don't know you."

"They do. There are the clergymen down at Naybury—they see me often."

"Yes, they are magistrates, I suppose."

"Not a bit. They visit me as one of their flock."

"Yes, the prize black sheep. Come, what's the good? I ask you. Now I know many people in Naybury, and you can't tell me one decent person there that speaks to you."

"Can't I? There's the Reverend Mr. Grafton, he speaks to me—and precious loud," thought Mrs. Faunt—"and his son, the Reverend Mr. Edward, he calls upon me and gives me money."

"Why?"

"That's my business."

"Just so. And the parish doctor calls on you, because he's the parish doctor. Any body else?"

"Yes, Sir, ladies call. There's Mrs. Bulliman, wife of a lawyer; do you know her? And Mrs. Cutcheon, a most respectable party; do you know her? And Mrs. Dormer, a beautiful lady; do you know her?—she called the other day, but I suppose she will not call any more at present, as she is near her confinement, and her husband, Mr. Dormer, has come home to be with her—but she is one of my friends. And there is Mrs. Mainwaring—"

"When did you leave Naybury?" asked he, suddenly.

"The day before yesterday, Benjamin. Oh, is Mrs. Mainwaring a friend of yours?"

"Yes, yes, I know her, and the other lady you mentioned," said Mr. Dudley, striving hard to disguise some kind of feeling, and affecting a curiosity, which artifice did not impose upon Mrs. Faunt.

"Mrs. Cutcheon—Mrs. Dormer—which?"

"Stop, Cutcheon, Dormer; I forget which I meant. Whose husband did you say had come down?"

"That is the beautiful lady, Mrs. Dormer."

"Then I can't mean her, I suppose. Has her husband been traveling in Sweden?"

"How should I know? He has come home, I know that, and perhaps he has been in Sweden. Is it a dangerous place? I heard they were all immensely rejoiced to see him back again."

"No, that can't be the lady I mean," said Dudley; "but I'm glad any of your friends come home safely. Well, we must think about this plan of yours. I will turn it over in my mind. What's your London address—m'm?"

"Up stairs."

"Here?"

"Yes; my old apartment that I took when I paid my last visit to you, and you were so rude. But I shall not intrude upon you. I have some acquaintances in town, and I shall be with them

a good deal. You will think of me, and see what can be done."

"Yes, I'll see."

"And so will I," said Mrs. Faunt to herself, as she went up stairs to take the room; her watch went a little fast when she said that she had taken it. "It was Mrs. Dormer that he was so eager about. What has he got to say to *her?*"

"Mr. Ernest Dormer has gone back to his wife, has he?" said Mr. Dudley to himself, as he sat down and pulled pen and paper before him.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE PRINCIPAL WITNESS.

"THE fellow demands a final answer."

"I should like to give him one," said Mr. Haslop, to his visitor; "but all in good time. Then, Sergeant, Ernest Dormer's urgent message to us was not necessary. Dudley appears to have no idea of getting out of the way."

"I don't know what made Dormer think he had such a notion. However, I have done as we agreed, and Dudley's goings-out and comings-in have been watched. I have asked no questions; it was enough that Dormer could have him when he might want him. Dudley now writes that unless we bring the matter to a close he shall take his own course."

"What does he mean?" asked Mr. Haslop.

"I have been trying to guess, but it is hard. He is an eccentric villain, and there is no calculating on his movements. Who would have thought of his sending those statements to Mrs. Dormer? By-the-way, have you heard?"

"Only a few words. She is not worse."

"But Ernest must remain with her, I conclude," said Penguin. "We must manage without him. Unless you have any suggestion, will you hear mine?"

"I want to gain a little time," said Haslop.

"You have some hopes of something, then?"

"There is a chance, but it is so remote that I do not care to say much about it—at all events, at present."

"Then I would submit that we apprise Mr. Dudley of our agreeing with him that the sooner the matter is brought to a close the better; that we have formed a very strong opinion on the subject, but that of course we are willing to give him a fair and final hearing, and that if he chooses to bring his witness with him we shall better be able to judge how far his story holds water—to that effect I mean. Then we shall see, and of course we can easily gain some days. You can't attend until—when shall we say, this is Tuesday—Saturday? But I am not inclined to play with him too much."

"Tell him Saturday, then, Here?"

"Let him come to my place. I fancy you would like it better, and I can't afford to be particular about the sort of folks I receive."

Mr. Dudley, therefore, was apprised that Mr. Haslop and Sergeant Penguin would see him at the chambers of the latter on the following Saturday at twelve o'clock, and it was pointed out to him that George Farquhar's attendance was indispensable. Penguin, who dictated the letter to his clerk, put this point a little strongly, but contrived to make the message somewhat more civil, and moreover ventured to imply more of the possibility of terms being made, than Mr. Haslop would have approved. Sergeant Penguin had taken some rough notes of Dudley's rough nature, and had not altogether judged him wrongly. The letter Haslop would have sent might have prevented a meeting.

Dudley received the missive with even more satisfaction than Sergeant Penguin had intended to give him.

"Who says the bold stroke is not the best stroke, Mr. Dudley?" he asked himself, as he re-read the letter. "The dispatch to Naybury has done it. My lady has sent for my lord, and has said enough to make him see that the game is mine. The women, when they have any sense at all, have ten times as much as men. Mrs. Dormer, your health!

"This meeting is, of course, the decorous way of doing the thing; or perhaps they want a little time to get the money. Wonder whether they will offer me less. I don't think that I will take less. Not much less, at any rate. Five thousand pounds is not much for a man to have saved at my time of life. But it is better than nothing. And then to drag one's self out of all the dirt of old times and old struggles, and away to a land where one's antecedents don't count, for the best reason that nobody knows what they were. I shall have a chance in the profession yet; and I have never had it, or I shouldn't be in this hole, while pudding-headed men rest their fat bald heads against the sides of carriages. Yes, I have played the right game at last.

"What have I done that's wrong, if I cared whether it was wrong or not. I have acquired a piece of knowledge, and I have sold it. What else is half the business of life?

"I wish I had not said that. Have I taken too much to drink? I wish I thought so, but I have not. I don't like my growing moral, and troubling myself with defending my doings. And such a defense, too—something I feel to be trash while I am saying it. Mr. Dudley, have you expended all your intellect in the contrivance of your great scheme, and have you none left to see it worked to the end? Bosh! I must have been playing tricks with my nerves. A good sleep, at any price. It is no extravagance when there is work to be done."

Next day he sent for Mr. Farquhar.

Since the interview with the Sergeant, after which it will be remembered that George Farquhar, calling on Dudley, was coolly treated, the young man had not come near his friend. Nothing had happened to Mr. Farquhar. Though his ignorance of his own profession was very considerable, and though his worldly subtlety was

of the slightest, he had obtained certain gleams of light as to the character of the proceedings with which Dudley had originally menaced him, and by a little reading and a few inquiries of men who knew the law he discovered that he had been threatened idly, and that no action could have been maintained against him on the grounds assigned by Dudley—illumination which has long been in the possession of all who have interested themselves in his history. But Farquhar's peculiar relations with his father prevented this information from being of much avail for his comfort; for though the enemy might not be able to act, he might apprise the elder Farquhar of his son's habits and proceedings, and the savage old man would at once execute the dreaded revenge. Therefore, though poor George Farquhar received an accession of hatred against Dudley for having practiced upon him, he was in no degree assisted to freedom by the knowledge. And as to the testimony which he was to bear for Dudley, Farquhar lived in hourly fear of its being demanded. The Sergeant could menace him only with more distant disaster, which might or might not descend, but Dudley had him in a present clutch. He had been grateful for the long reprieve, had made friends with his landlady, had abstained from his miserable little debaucheries, and had even bought the "Questions to Candidates," and frightened himself hideously at the inevitable result of a single column of such queries being placed before him for reply. But he was trying to read, and had even a scheme for restoring himself to the favor of the house to which he was articled, and which bore his absence with scarcely complimentary patience. When, one morning, he was suddenly brought back to his position by the receipt of a peremptory summons from Dudley, the unfortunate young man arose, and with tears in his eyes cursed his destiny. The tears were natural enough, the curse and the idea of destiny were of course conventions which nevertheless comfort a mind like that of George Farquhar.

Now, he owned to himself, the time had come when he ought, if ever, to decide upon dismissing himself from the world.

That he never had the least actual intention of the sort need not be said. But he found a kind of consolation in pretending to himself that he had thought about it. He looked at his razors, and put them away; he looked at a small bottle of laudanum which he had bought for the toothache (the mixture was so bad that had he taken it all it would have done him no harm); and he looked out at the back window into a gloomy abyss of an area far below, where certainly his business would have been done with much promptness, but he shut the window hastily, and cursed the London blacks that had soiled his fingers. It will be seen that the valuable life of Mr. George Farquhar was in no danger, at least from himself. Having cast a reproachful glance at the sun, for shining so brightly on a morning when Mr. Farquhar was in such doleful dumps, he remembered that the Thames at Kew would be sparkling and cheery, and asked himself whether he should go and jump in there. Having obtained a ready answer in the negative, he went to Mr. Dudley.

Mr. Dudley received him with some affability, but made no reference to the last meeting, and treated his coming as matter of course. This did not please Mr. Farquhar, who had a feminine liking for having all small grievances talked out.

"Of course I should not have come until you sent for me," said Farquhar, with coldness.

"Certainly not. Why should you? Quite enough that you come when you are wanted."

"I had a good mind to send you word that I would be here to-morrow, for it is a lovely day, and I meant to go to Kew Gardens."

"You did a much wiser thing in attending to your business."

"I don't know that," said Mr. Farquhar, sulkily.

"Yes you do, because I have told you so," replied Dudley, sharply. "Now listen to me, please. On Saturday next, be here at half past eleven, and in the mean time refresh your memory on all the points of your statement about Mrs. Dormer, and prepare yourself to answer any questions that may be put to you on that day."

"By whom?"

"By a friend of your own, a distinguished friend, and by another eminent personage who is desirous of making your acquaintance, and who joins your friend in a request for an appointment."

"You had better tell me who, if you expect me to come."

"Expect you to come? None of that folly, Mr. Farquhar, if you please. It is much too late in the day. You will be punctual. One of the gentlemen is, of course, Mr. Sergeant Penguin, who takes you out for drives, and the other—"

"Not a magistrate?" gasped Farquhar, turning ghastly white.

"I don't know whether he is a magistrate or not," said Dudley; "but he is a wealthy man, and has a house at Surbiton, and it is very likely. But it is not in a magisterial capacity that he invites your attendance. His name is Haslop."

"A conveyancer, in Gray's Inn?"

"Yes. But he does not want to examine you in conveyancing, or I could understand your looking so frightened. What a white-livered chap you are!"

"I am nothing of the sort; but I suppose I may be allowed what you don't seem to comprehend, and that is the feeling of a gentleman."

"The illegitimate son of a York money-lender calls himself a gentleman," said Dudley, brutally. "But I have no objection to your having any feelings you like, provided they don't interfere with your duty to me. That's fair, I hope."

As the coarse word fell upon his ear something told George Farquhar to seize a heavy brass weight that lay on the druggist's table, and having thus lessened the odds between a weak man and a strong one, to dash an avenging blow on the head of Dudley. But the latter looked hard and defiantly at him, and the enfeebled Farquhar could do no more for his mother's name than call Dudley by a vulgar one. At which Dudley laughed.

"Very likely. It is no business of yours. Your business is to attend the appointment and behave like a man—or a gentleman, if you like the word better. You mean to do so, of course?"

"If I am well enough, I may."

"If you are not well enough your father shall come up to nurse you, or send somebody who will do it better."

This menace was given in a loud voice, and an angry one.

"I am sold to the devil, and must do his work," said George Farquhar, bitterly.

"We have had enough of that sort of talk, too," said Dudley, who was unusually bent on bullying his victim. "Let us have no more of it. You have made certain statements to me, which you have caused me to believe and to repeat, and I don't understand the humbug of pretending to be a martyr. I should never have known any thing of Mrs. Dormer's conduct but for you. This I shall take care to make very clear on Saturday."

"Are you going?"

"Certainly I am," said Dudley, with a scoff. "It may be as well for me to be present, and see that my character for veracity does not suffer at the hands of a person who describes me as the devil. And," he added, with a still more disagreeable manner, "it may be well, also, that your medical attendant should be present to assist you, should the cross-examination be too much for your delicate system. Don't think that I would abandon you in the hour of trial."

"If any thing should happen to me between this and then," said George Farquhar, stung by the other's taunts, "how would your game stand?"

"Don't talk that sort of stuff. What do you mean by any thing happening to you?"

"You keep some friends in that iron closet, I know. Suppose that I have some of the same kind."

Dudley's eyes glared with fury.

"You dare to hint to me that you would poison yourself? Bah!"

"If I did," said Farquhar, "what would be said of your case? That when it came to be investigated the only witness died sooner than confirm the charges. You would like that, would you not?"

"You know," roared Dudley, with an oath, "that you dare not do it. You poison yourself! Don't talk to me."

Dudley's lips were convulsed with passion. For George Farquhar had made a good point, and it went home. Dudley did not believe that the other would have the courage for what he mentioned, but such a thing was possible, and with Dudley's game so nearly won it was maddening to think of a check. And Farquhar saw that he had hit.

"It is my business," he said. "I have nothing to live for. My health is bad, very bad, and my prospects in life are worse. And the brutal threat which you hold over my head would be idle if I were dead. Don't rely on my keeping that appointment."

It was a strange thing to say, and he said it in a strange, listless tone.

"Are you mad?" asked Dudley, in a fierce whisper.

"I don't know," said Farquhar. "If I am, the course I speak of would be natural enough. Don't forget that you asked me the question. However, if nothing interferes, I will be here on Saturday."

He rose to go.

Dudley sprang at him, and with a curse flung him back on the sofa. More violently, probably, than he had intended, for Farquhar's slight strength was instantly overpowered, and he received a violent blow on the head, which struck the wall, and he sat half-stunned.

"Is that the way to treat a sick young man, Mr. Dudley?" said Mrs. Faunt, entering. "That's very rough doctoring, surely. I was just coming in from my walk when I heard the blow, and I said that there was Benjamin Dudley in one of his evil passions, and I was right. But give the young man something to restore him, doctor; I am sure he looks dreadful."

"You go away, will you?" cried Dudley, turning furiously on her.

"Nay," said Mrs. Faunt, who had assumed a manner of a kindly old nurse, "let me make myself useful, as my time is in no way precious except when I can make it so by doing of good."

And she went to Farquhar, and gave him some water, and begun to fuss about him, after the manner of a good old creature who has had her pity excited by seeing a person ill-used.

"You are a great ruffian, Dudley," said Farquhar, as soon as he could recover himself sufficiently to speak.

"It may be so," said Dudley, who now began to regret his violence, as it might furnish a valid excuse to Farquhar for pleading illness, and escaping the important meeting. "Knowing my impatience, you should not provoke me by the use of offensive language. But you are not hurt. I should be very sorry to think you were hurt, George."

"I know it, and I know why," said Farquhar. "Will you let a cab be called for me?"

"Yes, I'll call one in a moment," said Mrs. Faunt. And she was not long in getting one to the shop door—scarcely long enough for Dudley to say to Farquhar:

"I really beg your pardon, George. I see that you don't believe it, but I am damned sorry that I gave way. But you know that we are playing for high stakes. I say we, my boy, be-

cause I have solemnly promised, as you recollect, to look after your affairs as soon as I have managed my own. Not a word to that woman," he added, pressing his friend's shoulder.

"Here's the cab, Sir, a nice four-wheeler; and let me give you my arm to get to it. I am not a young woman, but I am pretty strong. You want careful looking after, you do, Sir; and if I were your mother you should have it, too."

"This gentleman wants nothing of the kind, Mrs. Faunt," said Dudley. "Please to get out of the way, and let him walk to his cab."

"I'm sure I don't want to get in his way, Mr. Dudley," said Mrs. Faunt. "I only spoke for his good, that's all."

Mr. Farquhar looked at Mrs. Faunt, and thought that she was a nice motherly sort of person, and one whom it would not be amiss to know, in case of illness.

"I am much obliged by your attention, m'm," he said. "If ever I'm very bad I should like nothing better than such nursing as I am sure you would give me."

"I would try, Sir, any how, if you let me know. Mr. Dudley knows me very well, and would forward your wishes to me, I am sure; would you not, Mr. Dudley?"

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Dudley, only too eager to hustle his friend out of the way of Mrs. Faunt. But Farquhar, merely as matter of whim, chose to go on speaking to the woman against whom he had been warned, and Mrs. Faunt smiled and sniggered in the most kindly manner, and with a capital imitation of the class of which she seemed to be one.

"See here, m'm," said George Farquhar, giving her his card (he was very fond of offering his cards when there was no need), "this will remind you of me in case I ever write to you to come and nurse me."

"I shall need no reminding, Sir, for your face is one of those handsome ones as lives in a woman's memory; but I'll keep your card, and shall be proud to be employed, either by yourself, or when you have a good lady as wants the sort of nurse good ladies do want at times, Sir."

And then she allowed Dudley to conduct Farquhar to his cab.

"He's an ass, Benjamin dear, isn't he?" said Mrs. Faunt, when the doctor came back.

"Yes, if ever there was one; but an impertinent fellow, too. You should not have come in, though. I won't have that sort of thing."

"I know it was wrong, but I thought, as I was going up stairs, and knowing your amiable ways, that you were murdering somebody. Here, take his card; I don't want to have the cards of your friends found on me. What's his name? the print's too small for my poor eyes."

"Peter Williams," said Dudley, who lied like Napoleon the First.

"He looked like a man that would have such a name," said Mrs. Faunt. "But he looked more like Peter the Wild Boy that I've seen a picture of, when I came into the surgery. You shouldn't knock people about, Benjamin; one of these days you'll get the worst of it. Well, I am tired, and must go up stairs and have a lie down."

Mrs. Faunt had not been out, and Mrs. Faunt had been listening, and had heard nearly all that had passed. It told her nothing, except that there was a plot in hand. But she had abused her eyes unfairly.

Nursed as he had never been nursed since he left home, his apartment made tidy and comfortable by a skillful hand, his meals cared for, and rendered cleanly and wholesome, and his mind amused by a series of anecdotes derived from the narrator's personal experiences—they were not all exactly stories for a sick man, but all the more acceptable for their flavor—George Farquhar rejoiced that it had occurred to a kindly woman to enter Dudley's room at the moment she did, and to call upon him that very night, and set his house in order. How she managed the landlady, and contrived to obtain a latch-key, and let herself in when she pleased, and how, although Mr. Dudley had the grace, or the wisdom, to come thrice and look after his friend and witness, he had no suspicion that his other friend was doing the part of a fat but beneficent fairy, need scarcely be said. Mrs. Faunt's genius shone in what may be called domestic mystifications, and it would have been well if the old sinner had never devised comedies with a worse purpose than in the present case.

Perhaps, too, it is not very necessary to say, that having gained the weak heart of the young man, Mrs. Faunt proceeded to divulge the fact that she knew all the relations between himself and Mr. Dudley. That she should apprise Farquhar that Mr. Dudley had told her every thing, and that she should adroitly use scraps from the conversation which she had heard, and convince Farquhar that a third person was in the secret, was, of course, natural, and it was as natural that George Farquhar should be deceived by so accomplished a professor of chicanery.

It was rather unkind, however, of Mrs. Faunt, when poor, foolish, sentimental George Farquhar had finally confided to her the last of his troubles, to console him with specious hopes, and suggestions that almost made her laugh out when she offered them, and then to say, as she went down stairs:

"Benjamin told the truth there, however. He is an ass. But there is such a lot of 'em in the world!"

CHAPTER LXIII.

AWAKENED.

"THEY could but wait," Mr. Beccles had said. It was one of those cases in which Nature would have her own way. You had outraged her, and she was offended, but might in time relent. He could have recourse to a variety of tentatives, but they would serve no good purpose. They

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must wait and watch. If they liked to have physicians from London, he hoped that they would do so—nothing gave him more pleasure than conversation with the lights of the profession; but they would dismiss the parents from the room, and after a time would readmit them, to receive the assurance that Mr. Beccles appeared to have taken exactly a right view of the business. Mr. Dormer would do as he pleased, but Mr. Beccles desired to escape no responsibility. The case was one of catalepsy.

They waited and watched. Ernest Dormer's place, by day and by night, was beside his wife's bed. When his guard was relieved, for some brief time, the place was taken by the mother. And Magdalen made no sign, but she lived.

The fourth day had not dawned when Ernest, who had fallen into a light sleep, was roused by a faint sound, as of a murmur.

Instantly awakened, he could hear his own heart throb, and he heard it with impatience. But bending his head to the pillow of Magdalen his vigilance was rewarded—another gentle murmur stole upon his ear.

And then there was a movement.

"The time has come," said Ernest. "God help her—and me!"

The lamp he had long since extinguished, and a tiny light burned at a distant part of the room; but it threw no ray upon Magdalen or upon him. Still, watching with an eye accustomed to the gloom, he could see that the features were becoming restless. Then came a third murmur, and it was almost a moan.

He took her hand with the utmost gentleness, and he fancied that he felt a faint pressure, but was uncertain, and his own pulse leaped fiercely.

Then, for a long time, there was no sound or movement. And the dawn came, and grew stronger and stronger, until, in that darkened room, a face might well be seen.

"Oh, if it might be now!" said Ernest.

And the waking came. With her hand in his, Magdalen aroused from her long trance, and meaningless words, fast and broken, came from her lips, and she sought to rise, but her head fell back upon the pillow.

"Magdalen!—my own—my love!"

Holding by his hand, which aided her effort, Magdalen sat up and gazed at the face of her kneeling husband.

"This is not a dream," she said, softly; "I have been with the angels. That was a dream. I am awake, I know that."

"Awake," he whispered, "and in your husband's arms!"

"Yes; Ernest's."

"Ernest's."

"Kiss me, Ernest; it seems a very long time since you kissed me. But it was my fault, going away. I did not mean it, love. I did not know they meant to keep me from you. I will never go any more. You are not angry?"

Slowly, as the dawn grew bright into day and the sunshine besieged every chink in the curtains, and forced its way into the room, came a full awakening. Her husband's arm embraced her—his face was turned up to hers, and a sunray struck on the diamond in a ring she had given to him.

Magdalen started, and all trance was over; all bewilderment.

"My own!—my own!—my own!" she cried, and with a convulsive grasp pressed him to her bosom. He felt that it was shaken by sobs; but they were happy sounds, and he could have counted them as a miser counts his treasure. They were bringing her back to full consciousness, and joy, and love.

We may leave them to their deep gladness.

It was so selfish that Ernest stirred not even to tell the good news to her parents.

When Mrs. Conway entered the room, silently, expecting to find two slumberers, she saw Ernest holding his wife's hand, and Magdalen gazing on him with a tranquil love.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE SCOTCH LAKE.

The party at the Rectory gathered to the library, not by any express appointment, but from an instinctive feeling that the time had come when something must be said by each to the others before the household should be broken up.

The Rector had been there all the morning, busied, or seeming to be busied, with papers and accounts, but they made little progress under his hands, and from time to time he took up a book and frequently glanced at the clock. He might have been counting the hours that remained to be passed in his home. Mr. Abbott, at a small table, was adding attestations, or some other technical memoranda, to several parchments, and Mrs. Grafton, in the deep window-seat, with her head on her hand, gazed out into the garden which it had once been her pride to stock with flowers. But it was not of her garden that the mother was thinking. Her eyes followed the figure of her son, who was moodily pacing backward and forward on the grass-plot, and waiting to be called in to sign some of the documents which had been prepared by Mr. Abbott.

"I have endeavored to make you understand the precise meaning and value of these instruments, Mrs. Grafton," said the lawyer; "but as matter of business they must be read to you."

"I understand them," said Mrs. Grafton, "and there is no necessity for your taking such trouble. Shall I call Edward?"

"He must come, and he must hear them read. It is a form, but it can not be omitted, intimate and confidential friends though we are."

"Yes, you are perfectly right," said the Rector, with a touch of his old lofty manner. But he looked haggard, and there were more streaks of gray in the well-preserved hair than when we first saw him. "And perhaps—I speak with deference to you, Abbott—the sooner the work is done the better."

Summoned by his mother's signal, Edward Grafton came into the library. He, too, bore the mark of suffering; but whereas the father bore himself boldly, bated no jot of his authority, and forgot none of his courtesy, the son looked nervous, and was restless, and as one who would gladly escape from companionship.

"Before you take your seat, Edward, may I request you to close the door?" said his father, in a voice implying that he ought not to have had to ask that service.

Edward obeyed in silence, and sat down near his mother.

Mr. Abbott drew one of the deeds before him.

"Mr. and Mrs. Grafton, and you, Edward, are so well aware of the object we have in view, and that these deeds are framed for the sake of carrying it out, that I need enter into no further explanation. The means we adopt are the only ones by which we can raise the money which is now required, and I only hope that the arrange-

ment which we contemplate will bring comfort and peace to your parents, while you fight the battle of life for yourself. 'This Indenture made the twenty-third day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand—'"

"You should not have begun, Mr. Abbott, before I came in," said Mrs. Sullage, quietly taking a seat opposite to the lawyer. She had entered during Abbott's preamble, and had stood behind a book-case, which projected at right angles and concealed the door. No one seemed surprised, but Mr. Abbott said:

"The business which engages us, Mrs. Sullage, concerns this family only. I shall not proceed without their sanction."

"It will not be withheld, I dare say," was the calm reply.

"It is immaterial whether Mrs. Sullage does or does not remain to listen to legal phraseology which can interest those only who are affected by its operation," said the Rector.

"I beg pardon," said Edward, with irritation. "Either Mrs. Sullage has a right to be here, or she has not. If she has, I have no more to say. If not, I protest against what seems to me an intrusion for the sake of annoyance. I am not in the habit of interfering, mother," he added, in answer to a look from Mrs. Grafton, "but if I am a party to business, I am entitled to know who else are concerned."

"If I waive objection, Edward," said the Rector, "I think that you may be content to follow me."

"And it is my wish, Edward," said his mother, observing that he was about to persist.

"I have done," said Edward, turning to the window.

"If Mrs. Sullage does not feel herself in a false position," said Mr. Abbott, contemptuously, "in forcing herself into company where she is certainly not wanted, and if the company tolerate her presence, it is not for me to object. 'This Indenture made the twenty-third—'"

"Stop, Mr. Abbott," said Mrs. Sullage, as quietly as before. "Your intention in saying those words was to be as impertinent to me as you could be."

"The words are those of conveyancing, Mrs. Sullage," replied the lawyer, and he began to read again.

"You had better stop, Sir. Mr. Grafton is about to ask you to say that you intended no rudeness to me, and that you retract your expressions."

"If Mr. Grafton should do so, madam, I should with much regret decline compliance; and if the matter were pressed, I should beg leave to retire."

"I am sorry that my friends leave their affairs in the hands of a person who has so little discretion. It is not so long since I informed you, Mr. Abbott, that you were quite unqualified to advise Mr. Grafton, and you have now proved it in the presence of the family by insulting a person whose position you do not comprehend. I repeat my desire that the insult be withdrawn."

"Mr. Abbott will permit me to take it upon myself to say that none was intended," said the Rector, "and that he spoke only as a man of business, protecting, as he supposed, the interests of his clients.'

"That is your apology, Mr. Grafton, not mine, but if it satisfies the lady, 'This Indenture made the twenty—'"

"It does not satisfy the lady," she again interrupted. "The apology must be your own."

Mr. Abbott, usually so good-natured, looked round in a rage, but he caught the eye of Mrs. Grafton, who said, in a gentle voice:

"Do what is asked of you."

He gazed at her for a moment, and then said, gravely:

"Mrs. Sullage, I retract my words, apologize for using them, and venture to hope that you accept this retractation and the apology. May I now proceed?"

"If you please. But it seems to me that you are wasting time."

"May I ask how?"

"In reading those deeds, which one person here will certainly not sign."

"Who is that?"

"The Reverend Edward Grafton, and I believe that his signature is about the most valuable of all."

"What right have you to speak for me, Mrs. Sullage, or to say in presence of my parents that I will not do what they have wished and I have promised? Be good enough not to interfere on my account. Mr. Abbott, if he takes my advice, will now read on without paying heed to any interruption whatever."

"Have you forgotten our conversation already, Edward?"

"I might ask you the same question. But we have really no time to throw away. Pray let matters go on. I have undertaken to sign whatever Mr. Abbott offers me."

"You speak to me, I say once more, without at all understanding me."

"I could make a guess," said Edward, rudely, for he was becoming very angry with this woman.

"Make it," said Mrs. Sullage, gently. "You will not annoy me."

"Let the conversation cease," said the Rector, but rather in a tone of entreaty than in that with which he was wont to "stint the strife."

"I should like to hear Edward's guess."

"Then you shall," he said, almost brutally. "I suppose that you are a lunatic, of whom for some reason my parents have taken charge, and that your disorder assumes the form of a belief that you are a sort of superior being."

"Be silent, Edward," said his father, peremptorily. "Your idea is utterly unfounded, and ought never to have been uttered."

"I asked for it," said Mrs. Sullage. "Your father has now told you that you are mistaken."

"I have heard him," said Edward. "In that case I see no excuse for your conduct. If you will send those deeds to my room, I will read

them for myself, Mr. Abbott, and then sign them where there can be no interruption."

"Sit down, dear Edward," said his mother, "and be silent."

"Mother," he said, "I can not be silent, even for your sake. I have consented to all that is asked of me; I am ready to sign away all expectations I have in the world, and at the last moment this woman comes among us, and tells me that I shall not do so, and you all are cowed and submit to her insolence. Have I not the right to know what it means?"

"My wishes appear to go for nothing with my son," said the Rector.

"I am not a child, Sir, to be silenced without a reason. I do not think that you have ever found me unfilial."

"You have a right to know what my influence means, Edward Grafton," said Mrs. Sullage, "but I advise you not to ask. Believe that I interfere now in no spirit of hostility to you. I do not wish you to throw away your birthright. I tell you not to sign those deeds. But I will not tell you why I have a voice in this family unless your father himself desires me to do so."

"And I repeat," cried Edward, furiously, "that I will do as I please, and as I have promised, and I care nothing for this pretended mystery. Do you think that you can prevent my signing this parchment?"

"Yes, unless you are a fool."

"Fool or not, my parents have my word. Mr. Abbott, give me a pen. Where should I put my name?"

"You will not sign until I have read the deeds to you, Edward. I forbear from any remark upon this extraordinary interference with business, and I ask my client what he wishes me to do."

"Mrs. Sullage," said the Rector, with an effort, "will you favor me with a few minutes apart?"

"You could say nothing which I do not anticipate, and nothing which would make me change my course."

The Rector looked at her almost humbly, and it might have touched a stranger to see the proud features shaping themselves into an expression of entreaty. But the sight wrought no change in Mrs. Sullage. Her strong face remained in its strength, but if there were triumph she restrained any sign of it. She merely added:

"You knew that I should do this."

"I hoped that you would have seen how we were driven into a corner and distressed," he said, in a low voice.

"Was that a reason for my sparing you?"

He turned from her, and said:

"The business must stand over for the present, Mr. Abbott. I will talk to you presently, when we are alone, upon a modification of our present plan."

"None is practicable," said Mr. Abbott, shutting up the deed which he had so often attempted to read.

"And none shall be tried, by Heaven!" exclaimed Edward Grafton, coming forward. "I will not be played with. I demand to have that deed put before me for my signature."

"And if it is refused?" asked Mrs. Sullage.

"I forbid you to speak in my affairs."

"And if it is refused, Edward?" asked his mother.

"Then a son who is denied the confidence of his parents bids them farewell. I have friends in India, mother, as you know. I shall ask your leave to join them."

"And mine, Edward," said his father.

"No, Sir. I do not feel that you have any claim on my obedience. You do not treat me even as one friend would treat another, but you avail yourself of our relationship to exact a blind submission to your will."

"Is this the language of a Christian and a clergyman?"

"Let us have no hypocrisy, Sir," said Edward, now getting excited beyond measure. "Those words mean nothing between us. You know that they mean nothing. You are entirely without religion; and whether I am so or not, you neither know nor care. Perhaps I have some convictions which you would despise, and I have not learned them in Saxbury, but they are nothing to which you can appeal. Let us be silent on that subject. I have been willing to make a sacrifice for your sake. I am forbidden to make it, and you assent to the prohibition. Henceforth I go my own way."

"To say that you shock me, Edward—"

"Would be to say that which is false," said Mrs. Sullage. "He has told you nothing but truth. If that boy, whom we call a priest, and are told to reverence and to obey, has any religion in him, he has learned it at the knee of his mother there; not from you, who smile over the very periods which you work up for the display of your vanity. Have I not seen you composing sermons, Mr. Grafton? He has told you the truth, and I thank him for it!"

"And I spurn your thanks," said Edward. "My father has forced me to speak out, and I have done it. He would not understand if I were to tell him what I have endured as a member of a profession for which I had not been made fit, though I had gained a sense of its awful responsibilities. His conduct to-day has dragged this from me; but I shall not shock him again. Mother, will you come to my room?"

The Rector arose. His proud face was flushed with anger, and his noble voice seemed to share in the revolt against his mastery.

"It was reserved for my hour of worldly trial that I should be told by my son that I am an atheist and a hypocrite, and that I have willingly periled his soul. All that I have done for him from his birth, all the affection I have shown him, the costly education, the sacred profession, the certain preferment I have obtained for him, are all forgotten in the intoxication of a vulgar anger and a disappointed curiosity.

Let it be so. I humbly pray to the Deity, in whose existence he asserts my disbelief, that when my son's own hour of trial shall come, and when standing on his own hearth for the last time he shall bid farewell to the home he has loved, he may be spared the serpent-pang of insult from a child of his own."

The father bowed down his head, and sinking into his seat buried his face between his hands. He seemed to weep.

Edward's passion had been dominated by the solemn and touching voice of that appeal, and in another moment he would have been at his father's side, when his arm was seized by Mrs. Sullage. Her strong grasp was so effectively used that Edward could not escape her, and he turned savagely upon her. Before he could speak, she said:

"Is that theatrical address powerful on you? He gives the curse in 'Lear' much better; and I am sorry that he is in no humor to oblige us, though he is cursing me at this moment for what I say. Why do you struggle from me?"

"Let me go!" said Edward, "before I forget—what I would remember."

"Stay one moment. I told you that you would not sign that deed, and you have not signed it."

"I would do it this moment if allowed, and then leave this house forever!"

"Why be a fool? In due time the Rectory will be yours, and you will marry Phœbe Bulliman, and her wealth will make you happy, though her love may not. Then you will do yourself justice, and the oratoric powers which have already come to the ear of your bishop will become famous, and the Rector of Saxbury will be honored and envied. Why throw away your future?"

"I know not why I listen to you!"

"Because you feel that I have a right to speak."

During the fierce talk between the father and the son Mrs. Grafton had listened with a pain which found expression in her face, but which the speakers were too much enraged to notice. But Mr. Abbott's eye was upon her, and he watched the alternate flush and pallor, and once he thought that she was about to interpose between her husband and her child. Mrs. Grafton restrained herself until the former had delivered the solemn speech which Mrs. Sullage's mocking words had followed, and then Mr. Abbott silently led her from the room. Edward saw the action, and would have gone to his mother's aid, but the hand that held him laid no womanly clasp on his arm, but a grip that could be broken only by force. Mr. Abbott returned alone, as Mrs. Sullage's last words were said.

"We have heard that before," said Mr. Abbott, with a sneer, as he passed to his table. He thirsted to insult this woman, but scarcely knew how to do so after what had passed.

"This lawyer!" said Mrs. Sullage, with an indescribable contempt.

"Yes, this lawyer," echoed Mr. Abbott. "If a lady were not so terribly testy, this lawyer would like to ask her a question or two."

"I am silenced by one person only now. I would not have spoken before *his* mother."

"By Mr. Grafton?"

"Yes."

"Speak your worst," suddenly roared, rather than said, the Reverend Theodore Grafton.

And he strode from the room, but in going out he said words which were empty air, if he had been truly charged with want of religion.

"Now, Madam has no further excuse for her mystifications," said Mr. Abbott, as spitefully as he could, and it was not easy for him to be spiteful.

"That was not a good exit for a clergyman," said Mrs. Sullage. "Listen to me, Edward, and I will tell you what he ought to have said."

"Whatever I may think of my father's conduct," said Edward Grafton, "I do not permit others to discuss it in my presence. Perhaps, if Mr. Abbott thinks proper to inquire, on my behalf, into the position which you hold in this family, you may not object to satisfy him, Mrs. Sullage?"

"Your father's own son. Pride, arrogance, unconcern for the feelings of others. I don't know that it was worth my while to stand between you and the sacrifice you were bent upon making. Well, play out the theatricals, inaugurated by the Reverend Theodore Grafton. Let the lawyer ask me what he pleases."

"I shall get nothing but evasions, I take it, and some more solemn hints."

"Try."

"What is your hold over Mr. Grafton?"

"My knowledge of a crime."

"Whose?"

"It was shared."

"What was it?"

"A suicide."

"How can a suicide be shared?"

"The Reverend Theodore Grafton loved a girl who was beneath him in social rank. He took the course usually taken by gentlemen when they form such likings, but it happened that the plebeian girl had some principles, and he failed. Being very much in earnest, he managed a mock marriage, and when he ceased to care about the girl he managed to let her learn those two facts. Then, her principles not being strong enough to support her against grief and shame, she drowned herself. I have been obliged to give this long answer because you wished to know how the crime of suicide can be shared."

Mrs. Sullage told this tale without moving eye or limb. Studiously bare and cold as was the narrative, it was given without sternness. It was related—and that was all.

"This may be true," said Mr. Abbott to Edward, gravely.

"If it were not, should I be here?" said Mrs. Sullage.

"You are—I do not know that you may be inclined to say more?" hesitated Mr. Abbott.

"I was her sister, and I was also the witness to the false marriage."

"And were deceived, like her?"

"Not in the least. I planned it, because I hated them both. Him, because he had pretended love to me; her, for taking him from me. She died, and I had his secret. I had no revenge, or any such nonsense in my heart, but I turned my hate to account. Had I loved him, I might at some time or other have softened, and I know not what would have been the end; but my hate was my safeguard, and it was as strong just now, when he finished his false harangue, and laid his head down affecting to weep, as it was when my sister threw herself into my arms, and implored pardon for loving where I had loved, and when I soothed and pardoned her, and devised the scheme that ended in a Scotch lake. I resolved that thenceforth my fortunes should be his care, and I have clung to him while his own fortune lasted. I have nearly done with him, but not quite. Am I acquitted of mystification, Mr. Abbott?"

"The worst is that I am afraid to doubt you," said Abbott. "The man you charge thus is within call, and I can witness to your having been his guest, from time to time, for years."

"The tale is so base," said Edward, "that I dare not trust myself to speak of it."

"Yet you have known something of base tales," said Mrs. Sullage, fixing her eyes upon him; "and it is said that you know how to plot them, and how to tell them. Crimson to the hair—that is well, for you may mend—I will say no more, but spare me any words of a violent kind. I have considered the story, and my own doings, in every possible light, and you can say nothing to the purpose."

"Mr. Grafton married, though you had this secret?" said Mr. Abbott.

"Yes. I wished it. I desired that he should have a home in which he could receive me without scandal, and I took some pains to induce him to marry. When he decided to do so, I took still greater pains to ascertain the character and the fortune of the lady whom he selected. A woman who had brought him no income, or a woman of a temper like my own, who would have given me battle, and either driven me from his house or left it, would not have suited. Fortunately the charming lady whom he married was rich and gentle. I have not behaved ill to your mother, Edward. I have not abused my power. I have staid away for months because my presence has grieved her, but it was necessary that I should preserve my position. She may even tell you that I have stood between her and a loud and tyrannical man."

"She knew your story?"

"Not at first, and I take credit to myself for having told it. Her belief was, that her husband had been my lover—possibly that he had continued so after her marriage. That belief clung to her, and was destroying her, when I discovered it, and revealed all. She learned that there was no love between me and Theodore Grafton, and that Mrs. Grafton might receive me without contamination."

"Receive a woman who had plotted her sister's ruin?" said Edward, indignantly. "And my father permitted this?"

"Could he choose? I hated—hate him, but judge him fairly. There would have been a fatal story to tell against the Rector of Saxbury, and I need not say to you that when I laid out my plot I laid it surely and clearly, and had my proofs well thought over. I say this because I see that Mr. Abbott is already considering whether he can not blow away all, and set his client free. Let him try."

"Mrs. Sullage," said Mr. Abbott, "you have a right to be bitter, but I was not on that train of thought. Perhaps I was on one that might not displease you."

"I understand."

"Then be silent," said Abbott, with a glance at Edward.

There needs no mystery here. Mrs. Sullage had seen that Abbott had a brother's love—it might be another, but he had never breathed it—for the suffering mother of Edward, and amidst all this revelation he felt a gratitude to the woman who, as she said, had not entirely abused her power of evil.

"I have heard all that I need hear," said Edward Grafton. "Why have you hindered our work to-day?"

"For your mother's sake, Edward."

"Hers?"

"Yes. I am a better friend to her than her husband's lawyer, with all his professions of regard. This money would have been raised and squandered, and where would your mother have been, where would have been her home? Sign no deed giving up your rights, and when that bad, noisy, cruel man shall be gone to his account you will have a home for your mother in the Rectory where you were born, and where she brought you up with a lovingness that I never could comprehend. How could a woman love the child of Theodore Grafton?"

"I assume that the name you bear—," began Mr. Abbott.

"Yes, I supposed that question would follow my last words. I have had no child, and therefore I do not comprehend? Have I been married? you would ask. Yes, I married, and I am a widow. I have a right to the name of Sullage."

"What is more to the purpose," said Edward, who was hurt by the civility, almost tenderness, which Mr. Abbott was now displaying toward the woman before them—"what is more to the purpose is the question what you intend doing now, Mrs. Sullage. Taking your dreadful story to be true (and the most dreadful part of it, though I don't expect you to see that, is your haunting my mother's home like a vampire), I want to know what more injury you wish to do us? My father is ruined, and I conclude that your exactions have much tended to ruin him;

he can keep no home in which you would care to dwell, and I do not see what you can gain by continuing to persecute him. If we can raise a sum of money to buy you off forever, what sum will satisfy you?"

"You are practical, Edward, and talk as if you were already seated on the money-bags of Miss Phœbe. You seem bent on making me your enemy, but you shall not succeed."

"What else can I be but the enemy of my mother's enemy?" said Edward. "But my father is the great wrong-doer in that matter; for all the rest I forgive him, but not for that."

"Not for what?"

"For permitting you to haunt my mother with your cursed presence."

"Again I say, how could he have sent me away?"

"By God!" said Edward, with unbridled fury, "sooner than you should have tortured my mother, you should have followed your sister."

And he rushed from the room.

"He has spirit," said Mrs. Sullage, looking after him with no unkindly glance.

CHAPTER LXV.

A QUOTATION WANTED.

THE Saturday came, and by the first post, whose message so often makes or mars the day's comfort, came to Mr. Farquhar a few words from Mr. Dudley, peremptorily reminding the former of the appointment at half-past eleven. He needed no such hint, for the thought of the interview that was proposed had been too potent even for the narcotic which kind Mrs. Faunt had suggested and administered, and Farquhar, after a wretched night, arose weary, nervous, cowardly.

Kind Mrs. Faunt, now thoroughly apprised of every detail in the business, had done her best to arm him for the day's work. She had bid him be bold and firm, and remember that he was a gentleman and a lawyer, and neither of the two men he was going to meet was any thing more; and as for Dudley, he would be on his best behavior in their presence, and Farquhar was to treat him as what he was, a small apothecary who lived in a mean street, and who was hungry for money. All this it was easy to say, but it did not do much toward creating a valiant spirit in the bosom of Mr. Farquhar, who was perhaps more invigorated by Mrs. Faunt's bidding him consider that he was really at work for his own good, and that she had some influence with Dudley, and would do her best to make him perform his promise to deliver Mr. Farquhar from his necessities.

She was very urgent indeed that nothing should prevent him from keeping the appointment that had been made for him. At first she had not laid much stress upon his doing it; but two evenings before, after his return from a long walk to which she had almost driven him as a means of regaining health, Mrs. Faunt came in, and was exceedingly earnest that he should go. She had not seen Mr. Dudley, she said, which was true, but she had been considering the subject very much, and she was certain, knowing the world and its evil ways pretty well, that he would do himself much good by attending. And she had not ceased to impress this upon him until she had obtained his solemn promise to go. Whence it may be inferred that kind Mrs. Faunt had obtained some new lights.

He was punctual, and was well received by Dudley, who had made himself look extremely professional. Why he had taken this unusual trouble it was hard to say, for the opinion which Mr. Haslop and Mr. Sergeant Penguin entertained of him was not likely to be altered by his wearing a frock-coat and a white cravat instead of a shooting-jacket and a slangy tie; but we are all liable to do things which we can not explain. It may be, however, that Mr. Dudley, who intended to be more or less respectable in the future, thought that now he saw his way to that end he might as well begin to rehearse his novel character.

"Admiring the toilet I have made, George?"

"No, it does not suit you," said Farquhar, who felt that to-day he might say what he pleased, and that his friend could not afford to annoy him.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Dudley. "A most gentlemanly costume, Mr. Farquhar, I'm sure."

"The clothes are right enough, but they don't suit you, I tell you. If I believed in omens, I should say that you were going to have bad luck. You look like it, somehow!"

Mr. Dudley's reply was not complimentary, but he restrained the anger he felt, and, curiously for a strong-minded and unscrupulous man, he felt a good deal. A weak, silly remark, by a weak, silly fellow. No doubt that Mr. Dudley did not like it, and wished that it had not been made. After a minute or two he said—

"Omens be hanged! But you are just wrong, and it shows how ignorant you are of your classics. The Greeks believed that any unusual splendor in a house was a sign of good luck; and I am unusually splendid. Now then."

"Dwells in your mind—what I said does," said Farquhar. "By Jove! I say, I would put this business off, if I were you. I'm sure you are not up to the work you've got to do."

"We shall see, George, we shall see."

But he did not altogether disdain the suggestion, and ministered to his friend and to himself a cunningly compounded stimulant much in vogue with persons who hold the ancient Thracian persuasion that long life is not a thing to pray for.

They walked round to Sergeant Penguin's chambers, and as they went in Dudley said, pressing close to Farquhar—

"Be bold, and I am your friend for life! I swear it, George."

And there was something almost pathetic in the earnestness with which the man who had never before had a good chance in the world looked

at his companion, and begged him, as it were, to help him secure this one game. Dudley's lips actually quivered as he entered, and he laid his hand with a kindly gesture on the arm of Farquhar.

Sergeant Penguin was ready for them—he was never late—and he received them with something quite like a welcome. Dudley was rather pleased at this, but Farquhar remembered the exceeding gushingness with which he had been treated by the learned sergeant until the latter had got him into his power, and also what had followed, and Penguin's pleasant words made him shudder. Farquhar was a mean person, and therefore thought of mean similes, and he remembered that when the honey-pot was taken down, in his youth, it was that his mother might mix in a spoonful of its contents a powder that grated on his teeth, and nauseated his soul. What could be hoped for from a man who could bring that childish thought into grave business? If Dudley could have known it, he would certainly have dragged him from the presence.

"Well, Mr. Farquhar," said the sergeant, "Mr. Dudley knows what passed between us, and the counsel I took the liberty of giving you. He is naturally very angry with me, but that I must endeavor to survive," he said, laughing good-naturedly. "You have not found yourself at liberty to follow my advice, and that is a matter for yourself. There is nothing in what then occurred to disturb our proceedings to-day, and we shall go on as if you and I were total strangers—as we shall probably be for the future," he added, in a tone that Farquhar could not mistake.

"Probably," spoke up Mr. Dudley, "until my friend Mr. Farquhar is a thriving solicitor, and has briefs to bestow; and then, I dare say, Mr. Sergeant Penguin will be very happy to know him."

"Oh, you are thinking of criminal practice, are you?" said the sergeant. "I fancied your employers considered that low; but possibly you may act wisely. 'He that is down need fear no fall;' you remember the quotation, I have no doubt. Horsham," he called.

"Sir."

"Let Mr. Haslop know that I am ready for him."

"He will not be many minutes, Mr. Dudley. By the way, this is a business meeting, and you are a man of the world. You will not expect time to be wasted on amenities."

"You mean that Mr. Haslop was very insolent to me when we parted, and that he does not intend to apologize?"

"Well, if you ask me," said the sergeant, putting up the gold eye-glass, and looking at Dudley with an expression of considerable humor; "if, I say, you drive me into a corner and press that question, I don't know that I see my way to a negative answer, ha! ha! But he might have been going to apologize at the time," he added, slyly, "only you were in such a precious hurry to get away—to your patients, of course—that you gave him no chance. You should have seen your friend bolt," he said, turning to Farquhar, as if it were a joke, that must delight his heart; "and only because Mr. Haslop, who is usually as meek as Moses, raised his voice a little."

At another time this anecdote might have amused Farquhar, but he was then in so bad a way that he could not be amused, even at the expense of his best friend.

"Mr. Haslop seemed excited," said Dudley, exercising self-mastery the more that he saw the sergeant's intention to irritate him; "and as excitement is not business, I went away. I have no wish to exchange a word with him that is not business."

This was as well, for Mr. Haslop, coming in, shook hands with Penguin, and took a chair at his right hand, and as far away from the others, whom the sergeant had contrived to seat with the light on their faces. Haslop took no notice of Dudley, but looked with a little curiosity and a little compassion at the younger man.

"Very well," said Penguin; "and now, Horsham," he added to his clerk, "I must not be disturbed. Bring me neither letter nor message while these gentlemen are here."

The clerk having withdrawn, the sergeant said—

"We all understand each other so well that we may get at business without preliminaries. And there need be no picking and choosing of language, because there is but one way in which the transaction can be regarded. Mr. Dudley thinks that he can prove the truth of a story which he also thinks that somebody whom we represent may be willing to hush up at a certain price. He has made his demand to us, and he has delivered in his story elsewhere, a piece of conduct on which it is not needful to say any thing now, though a good deal may be said, or done perhaps, hereafter, in consequence. He having pressed for a reply, we have met him to-day, and he has at our request brought his witness with him. I understand him to tender this witness for examination by ourselves."

"Mr. Farquhar will be good enough to answer fair questions, I am sure," said Mr. Dudley.

"I am not likely to ask him unfair questions, Mr. Dudley, but I must decline to accept your judgment on their fairness. Let us have no mistake. You are attempting an extortion. Well, if your attempt is based on truth, we shall know what to say to you. At present, I tell you frankly, as I have told you privately, that you have got hold of something that may be true, and that you have tagged to it a lot that isn't. I said I should speak out."

"And I suppose that I may speak out with the same frankness, Sergeant Penguin?"

"By all means."

"Then I believe, Sir, that one or other of you gentlemen has now in his pocket a letter which tells you the story is true, and that the letter is written by the person who best knows the truth. And I believe, next, that you have

authority to make a bargain with me, and that you want to cross-question my friend here in the hope of finding flaws in the statement, and so working on me to take less than I have asked. Now it will save time and trouble if I tell you that I will not, under any circumstances that can happen. And so cross-question away."

"Without replying at present to what you have said, Mr. Dudley, I have to ask your friend to take that book in his right hand."

Penguin pointed to a Testament which he had borrowed of his laundress.

"I shall not, Sir. What right have you to ask me to swear?" said Farquhar, growing whiter than usual.

"None whatever, and the proceeding is perfectly irregular. But as you have come here to serve your friend, and as neither Mr. Haslop nor myself place the least reliance on your word, I point out to you the only means by which you can do him any service."

"I shall not take an oath."

"Your discretion is commendable."

"It is not that," said Farquhar. "I have stated nothing that is not true, and I refuse to be treated as unworthy of belief."

"But you *are*, my dear fellow," said the sergeant, almost affectionately. "You must see that. I don't believe a word, as yet, of what you have stated; and if Mr. Dudley expects to gain what he wants by the production of a witness like yourself, I fear he will be disappointed. Have you conscientious objections to an oath?"

"No."

"Oh, that is well. I should of course respect a conscience that was said to be tender, though it might seem to me rather tough. Well, Mr. Dudley, what say you? It is your friend who is hindering your business. Would you like to take him into the next room, and persuade him that having gone into this transaction he had better go through with it?"

"Tell the miserable young fellow," said Haslop to Penguin, half aloud, "that he need fear no indictment for perjury—perhaps that dread is muddling his ignorant head."

He spoke as not caring whether Farquhar heard him or not. Penguin explained to the latter that he was in no danger of the penalty mentioned.

"I know that as well as you do," said Mr. Farquhar.

"Then I really can not see why you hinder business, and I leave you to your friend. A word with you, Haslop."

They withdrew to the other end of the room, and Penguin said in Haslop's ear—

"Afraid of the oath. I told you he was a weak beast. But I'll bet you a guinea the doctor makes him swallow the pill."

"I would be no party to this work," said Haslop, "but that I believe the young fellow has a sort of conscience, and is afraid to peril his soul."

"He has got no soul, I assure you," said Penguin, as earnestly as if he knew.

Meantime Dudley, as soon as the others' backs were turned, had said to Farquhar something, coupled with a ferocious oath. Something that enabled Mr. Dudley to say, when Penguin looked round—

"I have removed Mr. Farquhar's scruple. It did him honor, however."

"That's lucky," said Sergeant Penguin, "for he has not been doing himself much lately. Then be good enough to take the book, George Farquhar."

And then Sergeant Penguin, who never could forget that he had been an actor, made a good point. Instead of swearing the witness in the off-hand way of the English courts, Penguin adopted the custom of Scotland, which is calculated to impress the only class who need an oath to keep them to the truth. Suddenly rising, he held up his right arm toward Heaven, as is the manner with the Scottish judge, and thundered upon Farquhar an adjuration of tremendous solemnity, and new to his ear. Farquhar kissed the book in much agitation.

"And now, Farquhar," said Penguin, sitting down and taking up the statement of what the witness had seen done in Vaughan's chambers.

"A word," said Mr. Haslop, earnestly, almost kindly. "Remember, young man, that your soul is now in your own hand."

"These Catholics are dreadfully superstitious," muttered Penguin to himself. "Did not I tell him the fellow had no soul?".

"That warning is most insulting," said Mr. Dudley.

"Do not fear my addressing such a one to *you*," was the reply. "It would be untrue."

"Well, never mind about that," said Sergeant Penguin, who thought his friend's theology quite irrelevant, and who was preparing, with some gusto, to make Farquhar perjure himself with the utmost expedition; "never mind about that, Mr. Farquhar, you will understand me when I say that I have reason to know that there is one —inaccuracy in this statement."

He looked hard at George, who reddened this time.

"Take it in your hand, and, if you please, correct that inaccuracy for us, as I have no desire to come upon you by surprise, or to hurry you into swearing to an untruth."

"Do you know what he means?" asked Dudley, savagely.

"I may guess at it," replied Farquhar. "Yes, I think I do."

"I know you do," said Penguin.

"Ha!" said Dudley. "I see. A bit more of the fair play I was promised. You began your questioning the other day when you meanly took this young fellow out with you, did you, Mr. Sergeant Penguin? And you got something out of him that seems to contradict his written words?"

"Ask your friend, Sir, whether any question of mine led to any knowledge of what I am now adverting to."

"No," said Dudley. "I shan't ask him that, but I shall ask him to recollect that upon

his own words, spoken to me, I have acted, and I shall tell him that he had better not have been born than have led me astray." The ferocity with which this was said can hardly be described. It was partly real, partly assumed.

"To frighten your own witness is usually considered a mistake, Mr. Dudley; but please yourself," said Penguin. "You know how much frightening he wants. We are in no hurry."

"There is a slight mistake in a word, here," said Farquhar.

"Where?" said the sergeant, quickly, rising to see whether the witness's fingers were on the word in question. Dudley was as quick, and snatched away the paper, which he then handed, coolly, to the sergeant.

"Nowhere," said Mr. Dudley. "That is Mr. Farquhar's statement."

"Well done," said the sergeant, admiringly. "You are a smart man, Mr. Dudley. But this difference of opinion between your friend and yourself calls for an explanation. Does he wish me to call for it more distinctly?"

"Will you let it stand for the present?" said George, so helplessly that even the sergeant felt a little pity for him, and as he privately said, postponed the scrunching him for a little longer.

"Very well, Mr. Farquhar, very well. All we want is the truth, you know, and after the terrible oath you have taken, I am glad to see that all you want is to tell us the truth. Now let us begin at the beginning, because that's the way the world was made, and we can't hope to better such an example as that. You are an articled clerk to the highly respectable firm of Sladdery, Brawn & Gribble?"

"I am."

"It is a very good house, where the best kind of practice is seen, and they would of course have a premium with you. May I ask who paid it and the stamp duty on your articles?"

"My father."

"He is a man of property?"

"Yes."

"Are you on good terms with him?"

"He lives in the country, and therefore I seldom see him."

"That is hardly an answer; but tell me this. Is he aware that you are assisting Mr. Dudley with your evidence in this matter?"

"No, he is not."

"You think that he is not, at all events," said Penguin. "You would be surprised, now, if you found that it had come to his ears—and—" he paused, and affected to be looking and feeling about for some paper bearing on the question.

"Good Heaven!" said Haslop.

"Yes, what makes you say that?" said Penguin.

"Give him some water."

Penguin looked up from the pretended search, and saw in Farquhar's face such an expression of terror and distress as even the sergeant had not often observed on the face of a witness, large as had been his experience in torture. As Haslop spoke, Dudley rose, took the young man's hand, and whispered to him.

The words were no menace, now, and they seemed to re-assure Farquhar a little. He actually clung to the hand of Dudley, and gasped.

"Do you think so?" he said in a low voice.

"Safe, safe. Go through with it—it is all trick," whispered Dudley. "Mr. Farquhar has been very unwell, of late," he added, "and I think that as much consideration as possible ought to be given to that fact, Sergeant Penguin."

"Ah!" said the sergeant. "Talking of consideration, I suppose, Mr. Farquhar, that you hope to have something handsome for your share in this ugly business?"

"I have said in that statement that I have nothing to gain or lose by it," returned Farquhar.

"You make a mistake in one of those particulars, I imagine, but that is your affair. And now, Mr. Farquhar, I am going to ask you a question on which I think, and my friend Mr. Haslop thinks, that our decision is very likely to turn. You state yourself to be acquainted with Mrs. Dormer, that is, to have known her when she was Miss Conway, and that you made her acquaintance at Mr. Justice Trailbaston's. How often in your life have you seen that lady?"

"Mr. Sergeant Penguin—" Farquhar began.

"Pardon me if I say that you will serve your friend best by answering questions instead of making speeches."

"I beg leave to say, however, that I protest against your introducing here the sort of cross-examination which is very useful and proper in a criminal court. You are about to ask me how often—if I answer that I can not tell the exact number, you will ask me whether I can swear that it has not been twenty times—ten times—five times, and so on; and I tell you at once that I object to being treated in that manner."

"I am answered by your protest."

"That I do not see," said Mr. Dudley. "Mr. Farquhar, as a gentleman, naturally claims to be treated as a gentleman."

"Rubbish," snarled Mr. Haslop.

"Yes, it is rubbish," said Sergeant Penguin, "considering all things. But it is for these gentlemen"—and he laid stress on the word—"to settle between themselves whether I am to get the answer I want, or whether I have to wish them a good-morning, and beg them to take any future course they please, except coming to me."

Mr. Dudley felt that there was a screw loose somewhere, and he would have given much to have had Farquhar with him alone, for a moment, in order to fix the place. He was certain that the young man had talked to Penguin during that drive, in a way that had given the latter a certain advantage, and Dudley suspected

what it was. But there could be no withdrawing now, and there was no time to be lost. Mr. Dudley met the situation well.

"You are quite right," he said, turning to his friend, and looking him full in the face, "to refuse to be cross-questioned offensively, and I honor you for your spirit. But to oblige me, you will, I am sure, not hesitate to give Mr. Sergeant Penguin the answer which you remember that you gave me when I asked you something of the same kind. You then considered well, and told me that you could speak positively to having seen that lady five times, and you believed that it was six, but were not sure. That statement which you made to me, you will, I am certain, do me the favor to repeat to Mr. Sergeant Penguin."

"I can have no objection to your dignity being saved in that way, Mr. Farquhar, if you like."

Farquhar bowed slightly. Did he think that the sergeant, whose hot pincers had closed upon his flesh, was about to let him go?

"Five times, possibly six," said the sergeant. "Well, that is, of course, sufficient to justify one in believing that you could be making no mistake as to the person. You think that, Mr. Haslop, do you not?"

"He should have known her, certainly."

"Certainly, and that is the principal matter, for that being granted, and what follows, the real case is complete. I do not disguise from Mr. Dudley that I think very little of his murdered tiler. Do you adhere to that story, Mr. Dudley?"

"Had you not better finish with one witness before you begin with another?"

It was a rash reply, but it mattered little, it was only accelerating matters.

"Very true, Mr. Dudley, and very sensible. Then we will finish with this first witness. I have only one thing to ask. You have made a statement for him, which he appeared to approve; at all events he bowed in a manner which shows that he is quite fit to mingle in distinguished society at Mr. Justice Trailbaston's or elsewhere. But business is business, and I will just, for form's sake, ask him whether, on his oath, of course, he confirms the statement you have made. Mr. Farquhar, you swear that you have seen Miss Conway, or Mrs. Dormer, five or six times?"

Penguin gazed at him mercilessly.

Haslop gazed at him pityingly.

But Dudley's gaze was that of a man who sees a coveted object in danger of being lost to him by the cowardice of another.

"Speak out, man," he said, hoarsely.

Before Mr. Farquhar, who was trembling with agitation, could reply, Mr. Horsham, the clerk, entered.

"I thought I said I was not to be disturbed," said Penguin, angrily.

"You? no, Sir," said the clerk, who knew exactly how impertinent he might be, "but it was this gentleman I was to disturb for a moment."

He placed a small piece of paper in the hand of Farquhar.

The latter read it once, without taking in the meaning of the words on it. Then he recognized the handwriting, and read it again. And then he sat back in his chair, drew a long breath, and smiled. It was a long time since a smile had been seen on the face of George Farquhar. And when it shall be known what were the words which he read, it may be thought that such should not have been the exact effect of the message.

The words were in his mother's handwriting, and they told him that his father was dead.

"Any answer, sir?" asked Horsham.

"Answer," said Farquhar, "why — who brought it?"

"A female that you saw last night, that was her word."

"And whom I will see now," said Mr. Dudley, suddenly fired with a suspicion, and rushing into the clerk's room. Where, however, he found nobody.

"Where's the woman who brought that?" he asked furiously of the clerk, who followed him.

"Indeed, Mr. Dudley," said Mr. Horsham, with the most irritating politeness, "you have asked a question which I can not answer, the person being gone."

"Then why the devil did you ask for an answer?"

"Because, Mr. Dudley, I was requested so to do."

And Mr. Horsham put his hands into his pockets, looked well over Mr. Dudley from head to foot, and remarked that the day was rather cool.

"Now, Farquhar," said Mr. Dudley, sternly, as he resumed his chair, "let us finish this business."

"It is finished, as far as Mr. Farquhar is concerned, I am happy to say," said Sergeant Penguin.

"Ho! He has answered your question. That is well."

"It is well for him, at all events," said Penguin; "for though, as we assured him, there would be no legal ill consequences of his stating what was untrue, there is such a thing as conscience. Mr. Farquhar informs us that he declines to say one single word more. Which means, of course, that his regard for yourself will not carry him so far as perjury."

"You have been humbugging him," cried Dudley, "and offering him money to throw me over. Is that it, gentlemen? Is that it? you shivering, shaking coward," he added, turning savagely on Farquhar.

"I am not shivering or shaking, and you will not see me play the coward again, Mr. Dudley."

"What do you mean by denying your own words, your own writing? Are you going mad? Do you recollect your position with me?"

"I recollect what it was. It has ceased.

We have no farther connection. Make out your own case with these gentlemen. You will have no further help from me."

"We shall see that."

"Menace is misplaced, Mr. Dudley," said Sergeant Penguin. "Allow me to assure you that I am as unaware as you are of the circumstances that have led your only witness to withdraw himself, but if it is to his credit that he declines to lend himself to a plot which has already done fearful mischief, and which will be fearfully punished, it is for you to consider whether, your sole witness having broken down, it is worth your while to detain us longer over the matter. Will you like to retire and reflect?"

"Yes. Farquhar, come with me."

"Pardon me, but I have something to say to Mr. Farquhar. He will be good enough to remain with me. And you have his final answer, therefore he can be of no use in assisting you to a decision."

"What, daren't you come out and speak to me?" said Dudley, with fierce scorn.

At this moment Sergeant Penguin rose, and without any affectation of disguising his intention to protect Farquhar, placed himself between the latter and Dudley. Then he said, almost kindly—

"I told you that you were playing this game all wrong, with your murder and bosh. You see, my good fellow, that it has gone to pieces. Speaking as man to man, I am rather sorry, but it serves you right for such infernal bungling."

The sergeant was a big and a strong man, and on his guard, but Dudley's intense inclination for violence was such that he could not avoid endeavoring to get round the other with a view to visit his rage on Farquhar. But Penguin pressed up to him in that kindly manner which he sometimes put on for the purpose of being more impressive with a disagreeable thing, and fairly shouldered him, but gently, from the room, assuring him all the time that he, Penguin, was really sorry to see a clever and a bold man fail in a scheme on which he had set his heart.

"Don't push me into the street," said Dudley, humbly enough, for he was mastered and beaten, and the physical process of being thus ejected brought the fact coarsely and plainly to his mind.

"I never thought of such a thing, my good fellow. Only you seemed angry, and I felt it was rather doing you a service to remove you from the temptation of showing your anger in a way you would be sorry for."

"That cub has sold me."

"Not to us, I give you my honor. Not to speak offensively, you—by which I mean your story—are not worth buying."

"But it is true."

Dudley's tone in saying this was—though he confirmed his words by an emphatic oath—almost piteous.

"There's something in it," said the sergeant. "I all along told you that, but what that is you do not know and can not discover. There's a statue in every block of marble, but it wants the sculptor to get it out. And, if you'll excuse a joke, you've tried to chisel, and failed. Ha! ha! Never mind. We all have our failures, and as Chaucer says, 'the wrastling of this world asketh a fall.'"

"You are a hard fellow to gibe at a man who has had a fall like mine," said Dudley. "But I have not done with you yet, or with Mr. Dormer, or with that lily-livered scoundrel in there. You may have to give me my money yet."

"But for boring you by saying the same thing twice, Dudley," said the sergeant, calmly, "I would again fix the date for the day those rooks turn white."

"You will see."

Mr. Dudley left the chambers into which he had entered full of hope that his game was won. But he would not now believe it lost.

"Who brought that note, Horsham?" said the sergeant, smiling.

"An oldish female, Sir."

"Had she been here any time when she sent you in with the paper?"

"Yes, Sir," said the clerk, meaningly.

"But I take it for granted, Horsham, that she heard nothing of what was being said in that room?"

"She heard nothing, Sir."

"The note was particularly well-timed, Horsham. Particularly, Horsham. We'll speak of this by and by," said the sergeant, entering the room where Haslop and Farquhar had remained.

"Now, Mr. Farquhar, you are absolved from your oath," said Penguin. And by way of completely releasing the other from his theological duty to speak the truth, Penguin took up the Testament, and gravely put it outside the room. Then he said—

"The decision you arrived at was a right one, and we both rejoice at it; but I may suppose that the message that was brought to you had more to do with the matter than you care to tell us?"

"I should equally have refused to state an untruth," said Farquhar, "whether the message had come or not."

"Of that I am sure," said the sergeant, restraining an inclination to wink at the speaker, by way of lending weight to assurance of belief.

"But the message tells me that what gave Dudley a hold over me is at an end. I came here from a sick-bed to serve him. I would not walk across the room at his bidding now."

"I imagine that you had better be out of his way, however, for a time," said Mr. Haslop, looking at the young man with a compassionate interest—how much or little it was deserved Mr. Haslop did not know.

"I'm not afraid of him," said Farquhar.

"Of course not," said Penguin. "I know your moral and physical courage," he added with a smile. He was quite incapable of appreciating Haslop's gentleness.

"You do not know why I was in Dudley's hands?" said Farquhar, with some dignity.

"No. But I advise you to keep out of them. I don't mean out of the way of his wrath, though that seems rather hot against you, but apart from him, because he might try some sophistical arguments to bring you back to his own purposes."

"Nothing in this world should induce me to assist him again."

"Then," said Haslop, kindly, "my dear young fellow, do forgive a man much older than yourself for asking you how in the name of all that is devilish you could ever have been betrayed into lending yourself to this fearful and false charge against an excellent lady?"

He held up the written statement as he spoke.

"Mr. Haslop," said Farquhar, solemnly, "the business is over, and never one word will be heard from me again about it. But I tell you, as I told Mr. Sergeant Penguin, that with one exception every word in that document is as true as the book he has just put out of the room. If it were my last word in the world, I would repeat that."

"And may I ask the exception?"

"I am made—I may well say made—to declare that I had seen that lady frequently. I have seen her but three times in my life."

"Three times! You *have* seen her three times, then?" said Haslop.

"Yes, on my oath."

"I should be glad to have some quiet talk with you, Mr. Farquhar," said Mr. Haslop. "If you will go down with me to Surbiton this afternoon, and stay the Sunday with me, I shall be very glad."

"It is very kind to ask me. But I have heard some news which makes it impossible for me to leave town; at least I think so."

"If it prove otherwise, meet me at the station in time for the five o'clock train."

"I am much obliged. In any case I thank you, Mr. Haslop, for having seen that I was the victim of circumstances, and for having made allowance for me. Mr. Sergeant Penguin, good-morning."

"A discriminating *exit*," said Penguin, laughing, as Farquhar withdrew. "Victory all along the line, General Haslop."

"We repulse that rascal Dudley. But what do you say to this man's renewed and solemn affirmation, when nothing is to be gained by it?"

"It is enough for me to say that I believe the fellow to be weak and base and cunning, and he may hope that we shall do something for him, though he can not extort it."

"That's not all you mean."

"The rest is of no consequence, my dear Haslop. When we have quite demolished Mr. Dudley, we may leave off work. What needs the bridge much broader than the flood?"

"When we have demolished Mr. Dudley, we have his story to demolish."

"Let well alone."

"Yes," said Haslop, "but it is not well while two shreds of that lie hang together. I am thinking of Magdalen Dormer, my dear Penguin. We have done nothing yet."

"What made you ask that young cad to Surbiton? I have a great mind to quarrel with you about it. You never ask me. Yet I flatter myself, though the young ladies do not adore me, that I should be a better Sunday companion than that fellow."

"I am a bachelor, just now. You shall come when I can give you a chance of rehabilitating yourself," said Haslop, smiling. "I asked him because I want to see whether he is entirely the wretched castaway you think him. If not, something may be done for him."

"What! After joining in a plot against your friends, a plot too that only a lucky accident made him abandon."

"If I convince myself that he is penitent, I have a duty even to him," said Haslop, smiling again.

"The superstition of you blinded papists," said Penguin, laughing jollily, "is beyond every thing in the world. I had made up my mind to say that which should have effectually prevented his name from adorning the rolls."

"And so have driven him from bad to worse, and perhaps have had, yourself, to ask a jury to complete his history. Will you please to spare him, for my sake, at all events for the present?"

"Of course. But," said Penguin, almost rudely, "suppose that this plot, in which he was part, should kill poor dear Mrs. Dormer. Then will you persist in mercy to the scoundrel?"

"I dare not say that I will," said Haslop, with emotion; "but even then it will be my duty to try."

"Nonsense, Haslop; no society can go on where such fanaticism—I beg your pardon—is tolerated."

"A society, called the Church, teaches me differently. Good-bye. I shall soon want you again, I hope."

"Bother his church," said Sergeant Penguin. "The man is as mad as Hamlet, or a hare in March. But I think I will go and telegraph to Ernest Dormer that the case has broken down. He will be the best judge, by this time, I suspect, whether it is worth while to follow it up any further. I would give something to know what Mrs. Dormer has made of it for him. Luckily she had plenty of time to consider how she should put it. I must take care to say nothing in my message that can possibly clash with my lady's own tale. We must consider how to phrase it, so as to carry comfort to him, save her credit, and baffle the clown at the Naybury station. A good quotation would do it, but the confounded fellows who invented the stuff for quotations never had a husband, and a wife, and a telegraph clerk to deal with at once. Billy the Swan, come to mine aid. You quarreled with your wife, at all events, and I dare say Iago on wives praised the exact merits not

found in Mistress Anne Shakspeare. Let's have a hunt."

Sergeant Penguin had no occasion to ask his laundress for a Shakspeare.

CHAPTER LXVI.

SOME FEMININE ETHICS.

As Mr. Beccles had foretold, the return of Ernest Dormer at once worked well for Magdalen. Her recovery from the species of trance into which she had been thrown was followed by a condition of great physical weakness, but her mind became calm after the first agitation of joy had subsided, and the doctor gladly claimed her once more as a patient with whom he must be permitted to deal in his own way, and with absolute power.

Ernest felt that he had much to say, and was restless under the doctor's prohibition against any excitement being caused to Magdalen.

Magdalen had no desire to speak.

Her happiness was to lie quietly gazing on him, and holding his hand. Sometimes she fell into a light sleep, and Ernest, watching her, saw the little puzzled frown come faintly on the pale brow, followed by a faint moonlight smile, and then she awoke without a start, and smiled again, but consciously, on her husband. Very few words passed her lips, but one thing she repeated daily—nightly—in a whisper.

"You are home."

Several days passed, and Magdalen grew visibly stronger, and was allowed to speak a little on the incidents of the day, and gradually to converse more freely. It was on the seventh evening from that on which Ernest had left London, that he was seated by his wife, and they were watching a sunset of rare beauty, when Magdalen suddenly said—

"I know you wish to talk to me, love, but there is nothing that you need tell me."

"Indeed I do, but Beceles forbids, and he must be obeyed," said Ernest, pressing her hand to his lips. "So not a word, yet, dearest."

"Yes, one. May I ask you a question?"

"May you?"

"I know I may. Answer it truthfully, dear—I mean, do not conceal any thing because I am weak. I shall be the stronger for your telling me."

"I will tell you," said Ernest.

He thought that she was going to question him on the letter from Walter Latrobe.

"Dear—the story about me. Has it been cleared up?"

"My own Magdalen—"

"I am your own Magdalen, darling. But answer that in one word."

"No. But—"

"Not another word. Oh, I am so happy! So happy. Kiss me. Do you want to be told why, my love? The story is not cleared up, and yet you are here. Oh, you do love me, Ernest, you do, you do. And I am so happy. We will speak no more about any thing that has gone by. Perhaps, yes, when I am very well and strong, and we are in the Highlands again. But no more now. Only help me to get well, by staying near me and being very kind. But that you always are."

"No, I have not been kind," said Ernest, "and yet I have not meant to be unkind. I must tell you many things, but I dare not yet."

"I will hear nothing. You are here, and that is all. And you have been ill too, I have seen it in your face, and you have been sorrowful. Not so sorrowful since you came home, though, for you felt that I must get well. I could not have died, Ernest, without seeing you again, and telling you that I blessed you for making me so happy in our other days. At least I do not think I could, but if it had pleased God to take me, that would have been the message mamma would have had to give you, when you came to kiss me for the last time. I know you would have kissed me in my coffin, even if we had not spoken again. Ah, I will not look at you," she said, embracing him, "for I know I have made you cry, and I did not mean it. There is nothing to cry for now, love. We are together again, and I am getting well."

"The greatest care, of course the greatest care," answered Mr. Beccles, rather impatiently, in the library. "But Dormer is the best assistant I ever had, and I can go away with confidence. While the air is warm, let her have as much of it as can come in, and perhaps it may not be very long before we take her into it. But above all things, no hurry."

"He is right," said Mr. Conway. "You feel that, Ernest?"

"Assuredly. I think I see why you ask me."

"And papa need not have asked you, Ernest dear," said Mrs. Conway.

"We understand one another," replied Ernest. "Magdalen has laid her finger on my lips, and has utterly forbidden a word until she is restored to strength. But she declares, dear child, that she is happy. What shall I say to you? There has been a strange agency at work, and it is not yet crushed."

"Ernest, you have given us back our child, and we give you back our love," said Mr. Conway.

"It was never taken away," sobbed Mrs. Conway.

"I will not say that," said her husband, gravely. "Had Magdalen—had the heaviest blow come, we should have met Ernest once more in this world, and only once. I do not affect to make light of what has happened. We have been very near a great misery. As to what produced it, I am quite content to wait Ernest's time for explanation, and if it never comes, I shall not care for it while Magdalen is satisfied."

"Do not speak in that tone, William."

"Does Ernest find any thing to complain of?"

"No. It would be strange indeed if *you* accepted my return as a full reparation for what has passed. And if I ask you to bear with me for a few days, it is only that I may be able, when I tell you the story, to tell it to the very end. It was only, Mr. Conway, my desire to be able to do that, which made me ask you whether I dared stay another day in London. Now, and because I can not leave Magdalen, the work must remain unfinished, but not a day longer than I can help."

"Do not speak, do not think of leaving her, I implore you," said Mrs. Conway. "Better that the dark story should be a mystery forever."

"At least," said Mr. Conway, "you will not go except at our wish—give us that pledge, Ernest. I am not one to stand between you and honor—you may trust me."

"And you may trust me, when I tell you here, as I told you in London, that only Magdalen could have brought me away, after I had opened the packet which you gave me. I have an account to settle with the man who sent that packet here, but it is none the less safe for standing over."

"Then, until you please, no more of the past. You are an excellent nurse, Ernest, as Beccles allows, but you are not to knock yourself up. I wish you would get a ride. Shall I ask Fanshaw to lend you a horse?"

"Not at present, thanks. This house, and sometimes the garden, are my tether until I can be spared for a longer journey than Fanshaw's horse can go. I am looking for a book, mamma. I am to read to her for a little while when she awakes."

"Nothing has been altered here, Ernest. All is as you left it."

"Magdalen came in here—my dear friends, the recollection is painful, but tell me for once and for all—Magdalen came in here from a walk, and found a letter. I will speak of that presently. But where had she been—whom had she met or seen?"

"She had been to her poor folks at Trafalgar," said Mr. Conway. "I know not whom she had relieved, but she must have met Edward Grafton, who accompanied her part of the way back, but left her when she saw me. She said nothing when we returned, but came up here, and found a letter which she brought down. You know the rest."

"Edward Grafton. And that interview had agitated her. What could he have to say to her?"

"I can not tell. You know that he once hoped to make her his wife."

"Yes. But he would not dare. — Stay. Does Grafton visit at Martletowers?"

"No. I think not," said Mrs. Conway. "He is by no means one of Mrs. De Gully's sort. And I remember hearing that he was personally rude to her—that is, he told her the truth, as a clergyman—and she would not be likely to encourage him."

"I must know, however. Meantime, a word more. The letter which Magdalen found and read, and which she had read before, had another meaning than that which was apparent, but on the honor of a gentleman—dear Mrs. Conway, as the husband of your child—I assure you that it was no communication which you would think I ought not to have received. It referred to something which was no secret from you. My aunt, Mrs. Stepney, had taken care of that. The letter, which I would not have received here, could I have helped it, was meant to tell me that due provision had been made for some from whom I was forever separated, and that it had been gladly accepted."

"I was right, William," said Mrs. Conway, in a low voice, but not so low as to escape the ear of Ernest, nor was it intended to be unheard by him.

"Magdalen is happy," said Mr. Conway, almost sternly. "Therefore, let the past be past. It is due to Mrs. Stepney to add that she never said a word in the sense at which Dormer hints."

"That is not quite so, William."

"To me, then," said Mr. Conway, with the same manner. "The subject had better be dropped; or, if ever resumed, it should be as part of the explanation promised by Dormer hereafter."

"The matters are utterly unconnected, Mr. Conway," said Ernest, "except in so far as both affect me. I have given you an assurance which I am sure you receive as truthful."

"I do, Ernest," said Mrs. Conway.

"It is not for me to doubt my daughter's husband," said Mr. Conway, calmly. "We were considering, I think, whether Mr. Edward Grafton could have done any thing to produce Magdalen's agitation. I am unable to see how he could have done so. But the shortest way is to ask him."

"That is my business," said Ernest; "and as I do not leave the house, may I send for him?"

"Is not the house your own, Ernest?" said Mrs. Conway.

He wrote a brief but courteous note to Edward Grafton, and dispatched it, and resumed his place by the side of Magdalen.

"That is a revelation full of comfort for a parent," said Mr. Conway, when alone with his wife.

"As you said just now, Magdalen is happy, dear. We must forget what has gone by, and trust in the future."

"Yes. But again you have been right in one of your instinctive guesses, and I who reproached you for it have again shown myself a fool. I begin to fear that in keeping that other secret from me, you exercised a wise discretion. I suppose that my faculties must be deserting me."

"William," said his wife, in a distressed tone, "you are behaving more cruelly than you can understand, in talking in that manner. This, to which he has alluded, was not suggested to you, but to me, and you could not judge whether Mrs. Stepney had a meaning or not. And it is not like you to harp on a matter which I hoped you had forgiven and forgotten."

"There was nothing to forgive, Mary, and no reason for forgetting. But as to this bad story, what is to be said of Mrs. Stepney, a religious woman, as she calls herself, who knew the character of her nephew, yet deliberately helped him to a marriage with an innocent girl who deserved all a man's first love?"

"You will be angry again if I say what, perhaps, I ought not to say."

"Say it, and venture."

"I would much rather, of course, that we had never known any thing about this matter. But if all I hear is true, we are not the first couple of parents who have heard of such a thing, and it is not a necessary consequence that Ernest should not be a good husband. We are too old for romance, William. It would be very pleasant to believe that one's husband had never thought of any body but one's self, but it would be very foolish, and I am not certain that I quite believe it even of you. There was an odd story about you and some architect's widow, who was wonderfully anxious that her dear late husband's memoirs should be written. I heard of it. But you have behaved pretty well to me, all things considered."

"My dear Mary, your exultation at getting Ernest back to Magdalen has made you unmindful of all the moralities and the proprieties, and I hope you will tone down."

"That is the truth, William. I could rush about the house and clap my hands like an old fool. Don't scowl and frown at him any more, that is a dear. I am sure he is very sorry for any thing he may have done, and he has sat at Magdalen's feet, like Gamaliel, ever since he came into the house."

"Like Gamaliel! But no wonder at such a blunder as that; for wherever you go for your religion, it is not where Gamaliel is talked about. Do you seriously mean that I am to take no further notice of what I have heard, and am to receive Ernest on the old terms?"

"Yes; and not to call him Dormer. He noticed it, I assure you."

"I meant that he should notice it."

"What is the good? Come in and see Magdalen, and then try whether you have the heart to annoy a man whom she loves, and who is curing her."

"And you are not eager to hear the whole history of his absence, even though I told you of the strange effect produced upon him by that packet?"

"I am eager for nothing but to see Magdalen walking about that garden, and one thing more. Life is not made up of strong griefs and great joys, William dear, but of peace and content, and the less we care about disturbances of either sort, the better. Let us go into her bedroom."

"This is good preaching from a woman who can hardly sit still for delight at the return of the prodigal son."

"Do not call him so. What he has been, I dare say he has been made by circumstances, and now he is going to be all that is good and kind to Magdalen. Speak affectionately to him, William. I know that you feel so toward him."

"These are woman's morals, Mrs. Conway. But as a feminine question is concerned, I suppose you have a right to settle the law."

"Dear William, my mind tells me that you feel more rightly in this matter than I do, but my heart is very obstinate, and refuses to listen to any thing against Ernest."

So that affair was condoned, and Mr. Conway's hand rested on Ernest's shoulder as the parents stood gazing on Magdalen, and seeking to descry the return of color to her face.

"Beccles trusts to him not to over-fatigue you, dearest," said the mother.

"It is himself that he over-fatigues. Can you not make him go out, mamma?"

"No," said Ernest; "nobody can."

But he was mistaken, as he speedily discovered.

Mr. Sergeant Penguin's irreverent appeal to the great poet had met with the reception which irreverence merits, and the distinguished lawyer and ex-actor tried in vain for a quotation which should answer the triple purpose designed. He was therefore compelled to employ the post, a thing he rather hated to do, for like many a capital talker, he was, owing to early neglect, a bad letter-writer. He tied up, very curtly, the fact that Farquhar had broken down in cross-examination, but had adhered with solemn pertinacity (the learned counsel spelled it with an *s*) to his strange story, with the qualification of which we have heard. Ernest's reply was a reiterated entreaty that Penguin and Haslop would keep a watch on Dudley, and take any step, lawful or unlawful, for preventing him from getting out of the way. He sent Haslop a kind little message from Magdalen.

But Ernest Dormer did not need to trouble himself as to Dudley's escape. That person had not the least intention of getting out of the way at present.

When Dudley left the chambers, he was so beaten down by the defeat he had sustained, that he had not even energy enough to break forth into the torrent of savage language which usually indicated his wrath. He had previously become fixed in the belief that the other side was intimidated, and that Dormer's advisers were only going through some formalities before submitting. Yet Dudley was no fool. He had taken, as we have seen, long and patient thought over his charges, and he had supported them by evidence which might be valueless in a legal point of view, but which was strong enough, he imagined, for its purpose, that of producing

moral conviction. And so it had seemed to be, and Penguin's off-hand ridicule Dudley had treated, and justly, as a mere trick of fence. All that was wanted was the deliberate evidence of the gentleman who was prepared to testify to the presence of Miss Conway, and to the incidents which made up the scandalous history; and George Farquhar, under the double influence of some hope and much fear, had accompanied him to clench the accusation before the tribunal. Suddenly, and at the crisis of the hearing, Farquhar had abandoned and defied him, and he had been sent empty away.

The blow had staggered him.

He had lived a wild and reckless life, and it had utterly blinded him to the hideous immorality of the scheme by which he had designed to win his prize. He had seen too much treachery and vice, too much sorrow and agony among deceivers and victims, in earlier days, to be scared at the thought of the necessary consequences of his plan, and considered those consequences only as they might bear upon his design. Whether Magdalen had died of a broken heart (though he had small belief in such deaths), and whether Dormer were disgraced among his fellows, and were driven into exile, Dudley cared nothing; not that he was willfully or wantonly cruel, but that his selfishness and greed had taught him that his own success was the one thing to be attained, and that having a great chance of gaining it, he would be false to himself if he spared those whose ruin was necessary. If he condescended to take them into consideration at all, it was from a scoffer's point of view. They might, and no doubt would be very miserable for a time, and they might quarrel and separate, or they might hush the matter up, but any further exposure would be their own fault. Let them pay him, and he would be as silent as Andrew Barton himself. On the whole—they will believe it who know the distortion of mind produced by wickedness—Mr. Dudley had worked himself round to the idea that he was somehow in his right, and that resistance to him savored of injustice. If he had found that locket, he said—when brandy had enfeebled the brain and emboldened the tongue—he would have been entitled to a reward. He had found it, and a story linked to it, and he would have his reward for both. But this sophistry he vented only at certain moments of excitement: when sober, he took a calmer and deadlier look at the circumstances, and set himself to his task with a stronger will than might have been indicated by his maundering logic. He believed that he saw his way, clearly, to the gold he coveted. And the witness whom he deemed so safe had failed him, and all was over.

No, he would not believe that. Nor was it, in fact, obvious. As he went home, with his eyes on the ground, and heedlessly jostling the wayfarers, who thought he was drunk, new light poured into the brain of Benjamin Dudley, and again he walked erectly and defiantly.

But before he went into the battle again, he determined, like heroes of old, to offer up a human sacrifice. Farquhar was hardly worth his vengeance, but should feel it. Dudley had extorted from him the address of the terrible father, and to this the revengeful man dispatched a letter, in which the extravagance and profligacy of the son, his desertion of the office, and his being engaged in a nefarious plot, were set out in language that would not mislead for lack of directness. This letter Dudley, with a grim satisfaction, sent off to York.

To the message which had suddenly changed the course of Farquhar, and had bid him set at defiance his friend and Mentor, Dudley, curiously, did not attach very great importance. He did not, in fact, adopt the idea that the note had had that effect, and he attributed George Farquhar's refusal to spiritual terror. The young man was weak and ill, and the solemnity of the oath, the tremendous appeal of Penguin, and the quieter but more effective warning of Haslop, had worked upon his weak nature, and he had shrunk from perjury. Dudley had no time to despise him for such feebleness, but had rushed into hate of Farquhar, and avenged himself as has been told. But, what was the message? he asked himself, when he turned from pondering on his own scheme, to recall the interview at Penguin's chambers.

"The female he had seen overnight."

That conveyed no intelligence. It was rather calculated to put Mr. Farquhar's friend, who well knew Mr. Farquhar's ways, on a false scent.

He thought that he should like to find out, but he had no time to waste on Farquhar. Besides, Mr. Sergeant Penguin had probably placed him under protection, perhaps sent him away. However, he would try. No harm could be done now by taking a new confederate into the business.

Yes, Mrs. Faunt was at home. She had a headache, and could not go out that day. However, she would come down to Mr. Dudley, and perhaps he might give her something to relieve her head.

"Well, Charity. Headache, eh? Fortified yourself last night against the London air, and overdid the fortification?"

"Nothing of the kind, Benjamin. Don't be so rude. You always think the worst of people," said Mrs. Faunt.

"You shall see that I think the best of you, Charity. You came here with a cock-and-bull story about getting into an asylum, and wanting testimonials, and I did not believe a word of it. But you came for something. What do you want me to do for you, as I'll try and do it?"

"Very good, Benjamin. I overlook your doubtfulness of my veracity, by reason of your readiness to oblige. The testimonials I want, and shall thank you kindly for the same. But they don't hurry. Something is up which I presume does, and you are going to ask me to do you a service in return for that which you are

promising to try and do for me. All right. Short reckonings make long friends."

"You have hit it. You know the young fellow that was here, and that you got the cab for, after the row with me?"

"I remember the row. I don't remember much about him, except that he seemed a great fool. What about him?"

"Why, this. He was with me at a lawyer's to-day, and he had a message brought in to him. It made him very bumptious. If you go and see him, and get into his confidence, or in any way can find out what that message was, I'll give you five guineas."

"If it's worth five it's worth six, Benjamin, and I wish you'd make it six, because that's my lucky number. I was born on a sixth of the month."

"Do you call that luck? You'll see, some day. But I'll make it six. There."

"And what is his name, and where does he live? You told me, but it went right out of my head—no, stop—Peter Wildboy."

"Peter Williams was on his card, but that is not his real name. Here it is, and here is his address. Find that out for me; and, Charity, I say—I think on the day after to-morrow he will have a letter from York that will make him open his eyes. If you could manage to know about that, I should be all the gladder."

"Is that extra, or in the six?"

"Don't be extortionate. Nothing is baser than trying to extort money by means of a person's secrets, Charity," said Dudley, with a grim sort of humor.

"Yes, it is high base, Benjamin. That's true," replied the woman, eyeing him anxiously. "Is he trying a trick on me?" she thought, "and has he found me out?" "Benjamin," she said, "it comes to me, as the Quakers say, not to do this for you unless I am paid in advance. Do you see it in the same way?"

"Certainly not. But I'll play fair. There is half for you. Come. If you fail, I won't give you any more. If you find out, I'll pay you instantly. That is square dealing."

"I'm content." "No," she thought, "he would not give me three guineas for nothing." "And where is it?" she asked. Oh, Judd Street. That's somewhere by the New Road, I think. But I'll take a cab, and go like a lady, which I can afford to do, as you have been so liberal."

"Wrote to the poor young fellow's father at York, has he? Well, he has lost no time. I hope to manage the business to your satisfaction, my dear Mr. Dudley. I am sure I have managed well enough up to the present time, Mr. Dudley. To have the luck to catch his mother at the very door, and to get the news from her, and to make her consent not to tell him at once, poor thing, as it was for his good that he shouldn't know directly, and to manage to keep her away from him, though she was dying to see him, that was not bad, Mr. Dudley. And to cocker him up for the lawyers, and make him solemnly bind himself to go with you, and be your witness, as I knew I could get you to perform what you promised if he got the money for you, that was not bad, Mr. Dudley. And then to make it right with that clerk, who is a good-looking man for a bald-head, and to get him to listen and give me the office at the right minute, and then to send in the bit of paper that brought you out raging like a fiery flying serpent among the Jews, that was any thing but bad, Mr. Dudley. And now to collar the dragons—your own dragons—for going to get news about what I did myself, that's best of all, Mr. Dudley; and before I have done with you, I'll have change for the sham photograph, and that Highgate cemetery, not counting bad language, which is nothing between friends, Mr. Dudley."

Mr. Haslop looked in vain for George Farquhar at the station. The young man was, for the first time for many a long day, in secret, earnest talk, yet neither doing wrong nor receiving the wages of wrong. He was at his lodging, where his mother had impatiently awaited him. Poor Mrs. Farquhar scarcely steps upon our stage, though her unseen agency has long moved one of our characters. If we let her be seen for a moment, it is not that she is essential to the action, but because it may be pleasant, at nearly the last time we shall behold George Farquhar, to see him with a gentle hand in his own, and with kind and loving eyes gazing on him. Those motherly eyes dimmed as they saw that the son, on whom his mother had doted, the more that she had no one else to love, and that his existence was a taunt to her, had been living a bad and weakening life, and was a melancholy contrast to the fresh, bright-eyed elastic youth who had come up from the Yorkshire hills to be demoralized in town. But there were no reproaches for him, no reproofs. With a faint instinct of kindliness, the strange woman who had interfered with Farquhar's actions had made a revelation to his mother that weak and wicked as her son had become, he might be reclaimed, for he had some heart left. *That*, no mother ever doubted of her boy, in defiance of proof that satisfied all the world, nor did Mrs. Farquhar need that assurance. But it was well that she should know his errors. She had to tell him that the tyrannical and violent father, who had made her own life a misery, and had held out to George the fatal menace which, known to Dudley, had left the young man in the power of the latter, had suddenly died in the midst of an access of raving passion, and that a will, made by him in a period of compunction, and which he had sworn was destroyed, existed—and she was rich. What more could she have to say to her only child? Let us leave him with her affectionate arms round his neck. If he weeps, they are tears of which he need not be ashamed, and which we may be sure that she will not mock or chide.

CHAPTER LXVII.

MR. WIGRAM.

MR. DUDLEY'S next visit was to Mr. Henry Wigram, whom he missed twice, but secured at last by force of an earnest request that Mr. Wigram would be at home at an appointed hour. And as the hour appointed by Dudley was one which Wigram had fixed for a pleasanter meeting, he was proportionately out of temper. A change had come over Wigram since the early days of our acquaintance with him: the affectation of melancholy, which did not sit so ill upon him, had disappeared, and its place had been taken by a petulance and waspishness which made him unacceptable to his friends. Since the affair with Dormer, he had kept himself out of society a good deal, and this had not tended to preserve the *bonhomie* which men like in an associate.

"I am sorry to have kept you at home," said Mr. Dudley, "and it was necessary that I should see you, or I would have written."

"I supposed so, and therefore I stayed," said Henry, slightly indicating a chair rather than performing the usual courtesy, and standing on the hearth-rug, where he occupied himself, while listening, in drawing on a new pair of gloves.

"The fact is, that I have a favor to ask of you."

"That I also supposed. Is it the same sort of thing that you asked before?"

"No," said Dudley, "but it is a consequence of that. I believe that you have a sister resident in Naybury?"

"Well?"

"I was, I suppose, indebted to that lady for the delivery of that packet of which you took charge?"

"It was delivered, was it not?"

"Yes, I have reason to think so."

"Then I don't see that it concerns you how it got to its destination."

"I do not say that it does," replied Dudley, calmly. He had come for a purpose which he had no intention of defeating by resenting Mr. Wigram's rudeness. "I merely wish to acknowledge one obligation before incurring another."

"What is the other to be?"

"Assuming that I am right, and that the lady whom I mention lives at Naybury, I have to ask you to give me an introduction to her."

"Well," said Wigram, "that request is either a very proper one, or about as cool a piece of cheek as I have heard of lately. May I ask what reason you have for thinking that my sister would desire the honor of your acquaintance?"

The elder man thus insolently addressed by the younger one gave no sign of anger, but replied—

"I incline to believe that you will think the request proper enough to be granted, when I say that there is a person at Naybury whom we both hate, and that the object of my journey is certainly no good to him."

"You need not, Mr. Dudley, mix up my feelings with your own in regard to any body, and you may understand distinctly that I have no idea of connecting my sister with any act of yours. I suppose that I need not speak more plainly? We know something of each other, and need not talk much. If this is all you had to say, I wish you a good-morning."

"That you can do, Mr. Wigram, but you will scarcely wish to do it, on reflection. I am really sorry to detain you, as I see is the case, but I would venture to advise your hearing me with temper. I avoid any language that should irritate you. Hear me out."

"I don't see the good, but go on."

"Then, without offending you by any reference to my own feelings, which I would entirely separate from yours, I may say that there is a person at Naybury whom you would like to punish for an offense against yourself. Now, I see it on your lip to reply that when a gentleman has wrongs to right he does not do it with the aid of an apothecary of whom he knows no good. Doubtless, but supposing the gentleman has no way to do it, and suppose that the apothecary intends to take his own course whether the gentleman helps him or not, I might ask a duller man than you are whether it is quite rational to refuse without knowing what you refuse?"

"You have so exactly expressed my sentiments about your proposition, whatever it is, that I wonder you don't feel yourself answered."

"All that I want," continued Mr. Dudley, as if the other had not spoken, "is such an introduction to your sister—of whom I would speak less familiarly if I knew her name—such an introduction as would justify her in giving me some information as to society in Naybury, and just the hints which would enable me to give the widest circulation to some statements affecting Mr. Ernest Dormer. The lady would be responsible for nothing I might do, she would merely assist me to consider how I could most directly achieve my purpose."

"Supposing that I did what I shall not do, you would not find my sister willing to assist you, Mr. Dudley."

"You underrate your influence with her, I think, Sir."

"There, you see. A request for an introduction has grown into a demand for influence."

"I submit to you that of course I can go down to Naybury without the letter I want, and I can get the directory, and ascertain for myself who are the nobility and gentry, and I dare say that I should make some very good shots. But time presses, and if I do not act at once, it will be too late."

"Why?"

"Because," said Dudley, having once more recourse to his favorite Napoleonic weapon,

"Mr. Dormer and his wife leave England in two days. After their departure my statement would be harmless, but to drive them with it, as it were, from their home would be something like a revenge."

"You are wrong about Mrs. Dormer. She is very ill, and in no state to be moved."

"Is that so?" thought Dudley. "My doing, perhaps." And the thought came on him that if he dealt too roughly, he might have destroyed his own chances along with that life of her whom he had assailed. But he had no leisure to pause, and he instantly answered—

"You are right as to the illness. That is the reason for the hasty removal. They have had consultations with the best London men, and Mrs. Dormer is ordered away directly. I know that a cabin has been secured for a voyage to Lisbon."

"Then, Mr. Dudley, you must be a damned brute to propose to me what you do, and I should be worse if I listened a moment longer. Whatever wrong I may have suffered from Mr. Dormer, I have no quarrel with his wife; and if I had one, do you think I would wreak it on a sick lady just as she was about to be carried on board a ship? You had better go away."

Dudley ground his teeth. He had invented a hasty lie, and he, being what he was, had not considered what must be the constant effect of such a story upon any man who retained a spark of gentlemanly feeling. Then he went from bad to worse.

"I am glad to see so much true religion," he said, coarsely. "If Mr. Dormer had known that he was beating such a sincere Christian, who was going to forgive him so easily, perhaps he wouldn't have hit so hard, or boasted quite so much of the flogging he had bestowed on him."

Mr. Wigram pointed to the door.

"When I please," was the insolent reply. "I don't think you would care to try to turn me out of the room by force—Mr. Dormer's whip, perhaps, has left you unequal to that sort of thing, and so you may as well hear me through. I know more of Naybury than you think, and though I can't remember your sister's name, I have heard a good deal about her, and her many virtues. I shall have no difficulty in finding her out, and I believe there is no husband on the premises to be jealous of my visit."

"Or thrash you out of the place, which is what you mean, I suppose, you cowardly cad. No, but there is some one who can protect her, and I warn you that if you enter that house you will come to grief."

"I shall risk that, I dare say. And if I get speech of the lady, I may find that she has more spirit than her brother."

Mr. Wigram rang the bell.

"A policeman," he said to the man-servant.

"You need not take the trouble. I have said my say, Mr. Wigram."

"Shall I fetch him, sir?"

"If I ring again, yes, without coming up. Now," he added, as the man retired, "one word. Dare to go to my sister's, and it will be the worst visit you ever made."

"It's you who are slandering the lady, not I, Mr. Wigram. I know things are said, but I did not think matters were so bad as that."

Dudley rose with a coarse laugh, but he retreated to the door with his face to the other. For Wigram snatched the poker, and though he might not have had the courage to rush upon the man who thus spoke of Julia De Gully, Dudley thought that a blow on the back of his head might come within the limits of the other's resolution.

"You should have done that when Mr. Dormer came to see you," jeered Dudley, as he left the room.

"A ruffian," said Mr. Wigram, with an imprecation. "A cruel, dastardly ruffian. I hate Dormer, but I will forgive him out and out if he happens to break that villain's bones. When she is ill, and helpless. I hope that if he does go down Dormer will kill him."

It is pleasant to chronicle a good impulse, and it may be thought cynical to balance it by a recollection of other things. But what injury could Wigram do to Magdalen compared to that he had already done, by sneering and whispering her fame away?

"I ought never to have spoken to the fellow," said Wigram, very truly, to himself, "but that hag knows such a lot of things, and one did not care to refuse her a small matter. I begin to think that it may turn out not to have been a small matter, and I may have got Julia into a mess. I hope not, partly for the foolish idiot's own sake, and partly because it will give her such an eternal pull on me. I would go down and see about it, but I know she'll get money out of me. The governor did a very good thing for his pocket when he cast her off, a selfish old screw, and I'm deuced glad they petitioned against his return—wish they had turned him out. It's hard on me that I am the only member of the family that will do any thing for her. As to my advising her to marry, I did it for the best. I thought he was a right-down good fellow, and rich. Anyhow, I pay for the mistake. I ought to go down, though. He'll make some mischief, and drag in Julia. And yet it's a bore, because—"

He talked to himself—men who live alone often do—but he had an instinct of stopping when his conversation with himself became dangerous. On the nature of what might have finished the sentence we desire no lights, nor do we want to know why he presently wished, aloud, that the old hag was within hail.

"I'll think about it," he said, after a pause. "If I don't go, I'll telegraph and put the goose on guard. Stop, I'll write the message now, I hate writing in those pawnbroker-stalls at the office. Wonder whether we shall ever imitate the Americans, and telegraph politely, like gentlemen, instead of counting the words.

How shall I put it? Let's see," said Henry, taking out a form.

"Do not see a man called Dudley, or if he gets to you, beware of doing any thing he asks. Send him away. Most important."

"There," said Mr. Wigram, "neat but not gaudy, as the devil said when he painted his tail pea-green. Daren't have quoted that at the club, because fellows would have said they had heard it before. That's the advantage of talking to yourself, you're never snubbed. By Jove, I feel in unusual good spirits to-day—something bad is going to happen, I suppose."

Mr. Wigram gave the telegram to his servant with instructions to take it at once to the office. And yet it went.

Mr. Dudley retreated, very furious. He could not understand why he had been refused the favor he solicited. The reason assigned by the indignant Wigram Mr. Dudley believed to be mere fudge. The young man had a personal hatred for Dormer, and would not have rejected a chance of gratifying it on a merely sentimental ground like that which Wigram had assigned. There was something else in it. And, recollecting who had introduced them, Dudley began to suspect some new device on her part. But he was wrong, as a man is sure to be nine times out of ten when he gets into a confirmed habit of distrusting all mankind, especially if his reason be that all mankind ought to distrust him. Mr. Wigram had merely yielded to the instincts which it would have been better for him to have cultivated more freely. Mr. Dudley, moreover, was angry with himself for not having thought of a better reason for haste than the one he had given. But there was one curious thing in his meditations. He did not see that his request to be admitted to a confidential sort of interview with a lady of position and connections, of whom he knew little, she knowing nothing of him, was an extraordinary one. This blindness did not arise from the man's own arrogance, considerable as that was, but from the reaction of the idea that he was himself about to be a respectable man, and to take his place as an honorable member of an honorable profession. It was strange that he should wish to be that for which he was so ill qualified, but it was stranger that he should cling with a dogged resolution to the belief that he was going to be all this, at the time that he was employing arts that were least compatible with even decent feeling, to say nothing of honor. But those who have not beheld this kind of inconsistency in sundry persons, met in the course of life, have either been fortunate in their acquaintances, or have kept their eyes serenely fixed on higher things than human endeavors.

"I will have my money," said Mr. Dudley. His money! But he had taught himself to think it his.

Mr. Poult, the red-headed assistant, had received sailing orders, and whether he had completed his medical education or not, he must go on board and take charge of his three hundred men, women, and children. He had not used much ceremony with his instructor, for whom he had conceived a great disesteem, but had simply informed him, on leaving one evening, that he should not come back. To which concise notice Mr. Dudley had replied, as concisely, to the effect that the arrangement was lucky, as Mr. James Poult was not wanted any more. Dudley, however, added—

"If you had had a little more sense, and made yourself agreeable to me, it might have been good for you. I am going out of business, and I might have thrown a chance in the way of a fellow who had behaved well to me. If you like to take any of those books, or all of them, you may, and you will find some notes in them that may be useful. I don't want them—it's no favor."

"I did not expect any kindness from you, Mr. Dudley," said Mr. Poult, "and I thank you for your well-meant offer. But I would rather not accept it. I wish you good-bye."

"As you like, my good fellow. Go along. If there isn't a remarkable mortality on board the *Gentle Gales*, it will be wonderful luck for the medical officer. Better take the books."

"Thanks, no. They would bring me no luck. They don't seem to have brought much to their owner. Good-bye, Sir."

And they met no more.

"I wish he had taken the books," said Dudley. "I had a liking for the fellow. He has pluck. He may kill those poor devils, but it won't be by letting 'em die for fear of trying any thing that comes into his red head. The books have not brought me luck. He's about right there. But I am past luck now, and all depends on myself. So we'll have the shop shut up, and never open it any more."

Dudley passed one other night in Lancaster Street. His preparations for travel were expeditious. His intention was to follow up the plan which he had decided upon, and then to return, dispose of his business and property in any way that offered, provided it were rapid, and then to leave England. He would not, therefore, trouble himself to do more at present than to empty his cash-box, throw a few papers together into a drawer, and write a notice, scrawled in a large and legible hand, that nothing whatever was to be touched until his return. That night he drank deeply.

Next morning he departed, without a word to any one. A lad, whom he had been accustomed to whistle in, and bid take down or put up the shutters, waited in vain that day for the signal, and, lacking the accustomed coppers, breakfasted not, and, being hungry, stole, and dined in prison. So works the conservation of forces.

One thing more Dudley did before leaving. He went to the iron safe in the little parlor, and tried it, to see that it was locked. He did not open it.

"I may have to open it," he said. "No, I shall not. I am going to win!"

And so he went away.

In the decorously-dressed quiet gentleman, without a mustache, and with a beard trimmed to an unpretending size, who took up his quarters at a second-rate commercial hotel in Naybury, and who gave very little trouble, but asked a good many questions in a pleasant, civil, gossiping way, few but keen-eyed folk would speedily have recognized Mr. Dudley. Inspection of his single portmanteau would not have aided the recognition, as the card upon it bore the name of Davenport. In the course of his life some little unpleasantry had impressed on him the advantage of letting a false name agree with one's initials.

Mr. Davenport did not proceed in any foolish or violent fashion. He had explained a portion of his plan to Mr. Wigram, but it was the smaller part, and he did not lay much stress upon it. He had no intention, however, of being baffled by Mr. Wigram, even in the matter of the introduction; and on the third afternoon from his arrival at Naybury, Mr. Davenport drove over to Martletowers, and sent in an engraved card, bearing his name. The card had not been engraved for him, certainly, but he had obtained it by honest purchase, and with prudent forethought.

He was admitted, though his name was unknown to Mrs. De Gully. That lady received a stranger with a certain trepidation, but she had long learned that it is much safer to see a creditor or his representative than to shun either. He was inducted into a drawing-room, and, as usual, he made good use of his eyes, which, in the first five minutes of his prowl, while waiting for the lady, showed him the telegram from Mr. Wigram. Mrs. De Gully had used it as a book-mark.

Somebody came in, but though she was gracefully dressed, Mr. Davenport's eye was not deceived into a mistake. He had not been much among ladies of late years, but had retained certain instincts. He took no notice of Francine, who pretended to search for something, and then retired.

"Very good, my dear," said Mr. Davenport. "Now go and tell your employer that he looks a decent kind of person enough, and probably knows her, as he did not speak to you."

Mrs. De Gully then appeared, in gay and brilliant array, for she was going to a garden party at Lord Mazagon's.

Mr. Davenport felt the power that is revealed when awful beauty puts on all her arms, and as he confronted the very handsome, very bold, and very well-dressed lady, he owned to himself that he was courageous. There is a certain cowardice in that sensation. But he instantly rallied, and comported himself much in the fashion of his other and better days.

His apology for his visit, without an introduction, of course involved divers new Napoleonisms. He was a friend of Mr. Henry Wigram's who had given him a letter to his sister, which, by some accident, he had left out of his writing-case, but he had telegraphed for it to London, and it should, of course, be forwarded to Mrs. De Gully; but it being possible that he might have to leave next day, he had ventured to call, rather than leave the neighborhood without fulfilling his promise to Wigram that he would visit Martletowers. All was as fluent and plausible as could be desired.

Mrs De Gully was very happy to see him; much regretted that she had to go out that afternoon; hoped that he would not go away before coming over. She was going to say that he must come and dine with her, but she thought she would find out first whether Henry had sent him for any purpose of his own. Had he been in that part of the country before? There was not much scenery, but society was tolerably pleasant. When had he last seen Henry? and so forth.

Mr. Davenport made himself agreeable, and a little brusqueness, which would sometimes intrude into his manner, was not disagreeable to the lady. He was conscious of it himself, and casually mentioned that he had traveled a great deal, and had lived a solitary life for some years by a South American river, where he had acquired any thing but polish.

Mrs De Gully declared that she envied him, and then—it was her way to say such things to strangers—asked him whether he had lived with a number of savage wives.

After that they laughed and got quite intimate, and Mrs. De Gully began rather to admire his bold eyes, and talk, which, if not bold, showed her that it might easily become so, if she liked. She had a great mind to take him over to Lord Mazagon's. Her favor with that easy-moraled, good-natured old nobleman would justify that.

"But I did not answer your question about Henry," he said. "It was three or four days ago."

"When you see him again, I wish you would scold him for sending me mysterious messages and warnings."

"What a dreadful thing to do, Mrs. De Gully! You don't mean it?"

"Yes," pouted the lady—at least, it was not a pout, but it was an imitation of one, and rather pretty—"he sends telegrams, and I hate them."

"Ah!" said Mr. Davenport; "now you remind me of it, he told me that he had been sending you a telegram, and was going to write to you—some man who pretends to be a Polish nobleman, exiled for his love of liberty, is going about selling his family jewels, which would be all right, only that he isn't a nobleman and they are not jewels; and Henry heard that he was in these parts—he did tell me his name."

"Should you know it if you heard it?" said Mrs. De Gully, looking for the telegram.

"Yes—stay—I remember it without being told—the fellow's impudence struck me. He says that Lord Dudley Stuart, the great friend of Poland, was his godfather, and the jewel-man calls himself Dudley. Is that right?"

"Yes, that's the name; see."

Mr. Davenport did not mention that he had seen the telegram before, or allude to the circumstances which had prompted it; but he calmly asked whether the person had been there.

"No, and you may be sure I have given the most positive orders not to admit him; but Henry might have told me all this."

There was a strange willfulness in this man. On the eve of his new and final effort to wring out the price of his wicked secret, it pleased him to cast aside his cynicism and coarseness, and to attempt to play the man of society. And his strong will served him well.

They settled into the usual run of chatter—there was the photograph that of course Mr. Davenport recognized but it did Mrs. De Gully no justice, and the critic's eyes were not shy while he compared the real and the pictorial face and figure—there was the pet dog, the new novel, the playbill of some private theatricals (scandal about a lady's over-indulgent draperies), the French song, religious, in the French sense, and not particularly blasphemous—the white house across the fields, and the odiousness of its inhabitants—and the other usual subjects of intellectual conversation between man and woman, and all of them capable of illustration of a certain kind when man and woman choose to talk in a certain way, in which Mrs. De Gully excelled from practice and Mr. Davenport from native taste. And at length she was so pleased with her visitor that she said—

"I would throw over the Mazagon party, and make you stay to dinner, only I should get into such disgrace with Lord Mazagon, who is a great ally of mine, and defends me against the goody-goody women here. But if you will send back your carriage, I will drive you into Naybury, which is in my way."

Mr. Davenport resolved to avail himself of his success, and he might, not long afterward, have been seen by the pretty Mrs. De Gully's side, as she drove her pretty ponies Nayburyward. Francine had been remitted to the seat behind. Mrs. De Gully mentioned a few of the names of the people about, and Mr. Davenport contrived, in a very natural manner, to bring up the name Dormer as one that he had heard Henry mention, he thought.

"Yes, he married a sweetly pretty girl down here—a Miss Conway. She is very ill just now. I will show you the house as we go by, though that may be taking you out of your road. Where would you like to be set down?"

"That commercial inn will not do," thought Mr. Davenport. And he expressed a wish to look at the church, which he had heard was good.

"It has been spoiled, but it is good enough for Naybury," said Mrs. De Gully. "They are a queer lot, as the devil said of the ten commandments. Are you shocked?"

"Fearfully; but then in the East I have been accustomed to see the worship of the person you mention, and I don't like to hear him lightly spoken of."

"You need not go to the East for that, I am told."

Presently they reached Naybury, and Mrs. De Gully rattled rapidly through, receiving few salutations; and then the Conways' house was pointed out, and Mr. Davenport looked up in a brazen manner at the windows, certain that he had altered himself so much that were Dormer looking out at him, there would be no recognition.

"I am sorry she is so ill," said Mrs. De Gully; "for though she is no acquaintance of mine, the Naybury people are such Guys that one hates to lose an exception to the rule."

"Dangerously ill?"

"They say so. If Henry has told you nothing about her, you must not know it from me. But there is a dreadful scandal, and the illness is thought to be disinclination to face society."

"I have never heard of it, and I will be very discreet, of course. Has the lady remembered herself—forgotten herself, I believe you call it, though—or is it the lord whose heart is elastic?"

"We don't exactly know."

"Let us be safe, then, and suppose both."

"And that is just what we do. Now, here is the church, if you care about going in. Where are you staying, if I want to send you a note?"

"At Mr. Conway's," said Mr. Davenport, composedly. "Marley House."

Mrs. De Gully nearly pulled her ponies into a ditch; but she whipped them viciously, and her face was fire.

"You are not serious?"

"Quite. Drive me back to the house and see."

"But this is treachery—and quite shameful," said Mrs. De Gully. "You ought to have stopped me at once."

"Fear nothing. Do you think that I shall be less comfortable at the house because I know what sort of people my friends are? Don't be afraid, my dear Mrs. De Gully, that I shall compromise you in the least. I am too much obliged to you for the ride to-day, for your delightful talk, and for your previous service."

"What have I done?"

"Delivered an important packet from me to Mrs. Dormer," said he, alighting. "Accept thanks for all. I shall do myself the honor of another visit. Good-afternoon, and a pleasant party."

And he entered the church-yard, turned, and disappeared.

"There is no making you hold your tongue when you start," said Francine. "I poked you nine times to be still. I smelled him."

"What do you mean, you vulgar thing?"

"I smelled him, I tell you. It is the same odor that was in the packet I took to the house. Ah! it is vulgar, but I use the sense which is given me. A great lady is too great for that, so she gets in a great mess."

"Very well said, Francine," said Mrs. De Gully, "and as a reward for your quickness and politeness, please to get down."

"I am to get down?"

"Certainly; don't you hear me?"

The companion obeyed in silence.

"Now, go back to Chervil's, and he will give you note-paper. Write to my brother, and say you do so at my desire. Tell him that I have carefully guarded against the person mentioned in his telegram, and that a gentleman named Davenport—remember the name—who is his friend, has called upon me, and is the person for whom you delivered that packet. Say what he is like, and that he is staying with the Conways. Post the letter with your own hand, mind, and then come on to Lord Mazagon's."

"How?"

"Walk—it is only a mile and a half, and you like walking."

And Mrs. De Gully whipped her ponies, and in a minute was out of hearing.

"Will I do all that?" said Francine. "I think no. You are very good to set me a walk. And I am to say what he is like. I must look again, Madame."

To which end Francine went directly to the church, and, entering, found Mr. Davenport with his hat on, reading the monuments, and the recitals of virtues and rewards much in the spirit which he attributed to another Personage, when similarly occupied, and "knowing better."

The hat which he had not thought it necessary to remove in sign of reverence was immediately taken off as matter of politeness. He had noticed that Francine was on more familiar terms with her patroness than he had expected to find her.

"All the virtuous people of Naybury have died, I fear," he said, smiling. "It is very melancholy. Did you come to see me, or the tombs?"

"You."

"With a message?"

"No. Of my own will. I want to ask something."

"By all means.

"It was I who gave that packet for you to Mrs. Dormer, and I had much trouble with it. Keep your hand from your pocket, please. I wish you in return to tell me what was in it."

"At present I would rather pay any postage you like to ask."

"You will not tell me?"

"I must not do so to-day. When I next come to Martletowers I will."

"You promise that?" asked Francine.

"Certainly, I do; and a promise in church is sacred, you know—always kept, as every married person will tell you."

"That will do," said Francine. And she left the place of worship.

"That will not do," she remarked, outside, and then she considered what would do. It was not Francine's way to talk to herself, but on the present occasion she closed her thin lips more tightly than usual, and went to Mr. Chervil's.

"Can I speak to you a little?"

"To be sure," said Mr. Chervil, calling to his elegant assistant to mind the shop, and conducting Francine into a parlor. "Are you not well?"

"That is not the thing. I think you like Mrs. Dormer?"

"I have much respect for that lady."

"Bah, with your respect. Is your respect strong enough to make you take a little trouble for her good?"

"Let me hear how you think I can serve her."

"You know—all Naybury knows—that a letter was given to her?"

"Yes; and who gave it."

"So much the better; you will believe the more in what I say. The person who sent the letter is now in this town, and his name is Davenport. What he has come for I know not, but for no good. He is a bad man; I have seen his face. Mrs. De Gully told me to write this to her brother. I shall not write. If you like, you may. You have his address. The name is Davenport, and he is a smooth-faced man, but his voice is hard. Good-day, Sir."

"Let us see," thought Mr. Chervil. "First, what do I care what happens to any body in Naybury, except one person, and will meddling in this matter do him any good or harm? Good—out of the question; no good ever came to any body by interfering with other folks' business—memorandum, however, that proposition may be modified. I can gain nothing by interference. Harm—that depends on what I may do. Writing a mere note to Mr. Henry Wigram, at the request of a valued customer, Mrs. De Gully, is not an out-of-the-way thing to do, but is it her request, or does that pale little wretch lie, after the manner of her order? I will make that safe by stating how the message was delivered. But that was only part of her reason for telling me the news. I am to do something more with it. Well, I have made a good deal of money out of Marley House, and, I hope to make a good deal more. I will meddle."

"Has Mr. Beccles ordered any thing for Mrs. Dormer?" he asked of his assistant.

"I was just going to send it up."

"I will leave it; I should like to ask how she is going on."

He was a great deal better than he pretended to himself to be, and he was honestly and earnestly casting about for the best means of serving Magdalen.

Mr. Chervil called at the house, and, under pretext of wishing to speak to Mrs. Conway about the medicines, got speech with that lady, and told her what he had heard. Mrs. Conway's first impulse was to summon Ernest Dormer.

Ernest was at his post, reading to Magdalen.

"I know why you are wanted, dearest. But why did you send for him?"

"For whom, love?"

"For Edward Grafton. I heard Maria telling Anne that she was going to Saxbury with the note for him. And I heard a ring just now."

"I want to ask him a few questions, dear. I am sure you can trust me with him," said Ernest, pressing her hand.

"If you would say nothing to him until I am well, it would be good of you; but do as you please."

"Then I will ask him nothing," said Ernest.

"How good you are."

He was rather glad, however, to find that not Edward, but Chervil, was waiting for him. Then Mrs. Conway, in much agitation, told him what the chemist had said. And then they looked eagerly in his face.

"Good news!" said Ernest, with sparkling eyes. But his lips closed, and his words might not mean that there was good in store for the person of whom he was hearing.

"It is really good, dear Ernest?" asked Mrs. Conway, timidly.

"Indeed it is," he answered, "and I heartily thank Mr. Chervil for bringing it to me." And he shook Chervil's hand.

"I think that if it were my business," said Mr. Chervil, quietly, "I could add a gloss to that text, and that it would not be exactly in the spirit of a Christmas sermon; but as I never meddle with what is not my business, I will only say that I am much honored in being of the least use to any one in this house." With which polite speech Mr. Chervil departed.

"Ernest," said Mrs. Conway, piteously, "I don't think that you need me to say any thing. What was in that letter is known to yourself, and we never dared seek to know; we never, after our first terror was over, would try to ascertain why that woman had been the bearer. But will you not tell me what it said, and why you are glad to know that the writer is here? I see you are."

"Mother," said Ernest, "for you are all a mother could be to me—I dare not tell you all, until I can tell you that a slander has been trampled under foot; and as yet I do not see how that is to be done. But it shall be done. Only take this from me. The letter was a slanderer's, and the man has come within my reach, or is coming. When I have dealt with him you shall know all."

"But for Magdalen's sake—"

"Dearest mother, trust me. But for her sake I should be at this moment hunting him down. But he may elude me, and come here, and Magdalen, who is now tremblingly alive to every sound—it is a part of the illness—she might hear that which I would strike off my hand to keep from her mind. Fear nothing for me. I have a good mind to comfort you a little more," he added, kindly. "I have had a letter from London, which tells me of a great blow the villain has received in connection with this business. I must not say more, but all is working well."

"Thank God for it. But oh, Ernest, plot, and mystery, and secret, and slander, and all round that child's bed!"

"It is frightful. But it must be swept away by such means as we dare use. I dare not ask any thing of her."

"Of *her*, Ernest?" exclaimed Mrs. Conway. "Magdalen is slandered? Who—what—what wickedness is this? You have, indeed, kept back a bitter secret. Magdalen!"

"Mother, had it been myself, do you think that I would have left her in doubt for an hour? True or false, any charge against me should have been told out before you all. I would have repaid all your generous trust with a frankness that might have ruined me, but which you should have approved. But when her name was brought into a wild, strange story, of which I swear to you that I have believed no jot, but which I can not unriddle, I showed myself true to her by keeping it from her, even at the cost of her happiness. The tale has been revealed to her by the infernal art of the plotter, and I am by her side. You must love me and trust me still, mother!"

His words, and the tenderness with which they were spoken, had some consolation in them, but the mother's heart was deeply wounded, the mother's pride was rudely shocked. She could make him no answer, but embraced him and hastened from his presence.

"Here, is he, and under a false name?" said Ernest. "We have tried all ways but one—now for that. But he must not come here. I would fell him at the gate, rather than that Magdalen should hear his voice."

Besides the gate of which Ernest had spoken there was a second, for the trades-people and the servants. But both could be seen from the hall. Ernest Dormer gave orders, which Mr. Conway's domestics were delighted to receive. The regulation gave them not only new importance, but increased intimacy with their superiors—that no person, under any pretense or excuse whatever, was to be admitted at either gate for the next two days, until Mr. Dormer had been called down to the hall to see him as he entered the garden. The rest was his own business, and Ernest Dormer knew how he meant to do it. The apparent absurdity of being called down twenty times to take note of the most harmless visitors, and sanction their entrance, had no weight with Dormer. He was too wise a hunter to miss his game by a haughty superiority to trifles. But he had not to watch long.

Having given his orders, he returned to Magdalen.

"It was not he, dearest," he said.

"No, it was Mr. Chervil. I heard him speak at the gate. What made him come here, Ernest?"

"He had to pass us, he says, so he brought your medicine."

"And he has brought some for you, Ernest, and it has done you good. I can tell by your

voice that you have heard something that has pleased you. Now, I ask to know it, Sir."

It was the first time that she had called him by the playful title of honor.

"You said that I was good, just now, my darling, for agreeing to put no questions to Edward Grafton. Pay me back by not asking me this until I can give you more pleasure, by telling you more than I know. Yet I will tell you, if you insist."

"Whisper, Ernest."

He bent her ear close to his lips.

"I will pay with *that*. Be grateful, Sir. And now go on with your reading, unless it tires you, love."

He hoped and believed that he was safe in offering to answer, yet half feared that the excited sensibility of convalescence might impel her to press her wish. Had Magdalen done this, the truth must have been told, for Ernest Dormer, during his long vigil by the side of his wife, had made a vow—no, vow-making was no habit with Dormer—but had convinced himself that with a woman like her who lay near him, it would never be well to use deceit, even for her apparent good. It takes many men a long time to arrive at that conviction in regard to their wives—some men never attain to it at all—but it may be said, not uncharitably, that this is the wife's fault.

Ernest resumed his reading, and Magdalen listened to M. Alexandre Dumas. For they had never contrived to finish that wonderful tale of the Queen Margot, which they began at the foot of the cataract.

"Do you remember," said Magdalen, "how indolent we used to get when we tried to read within hearing of the voice of the water-fall? Or perhaps, as you said, we were not indolent, but we felt, without knowing it, that the water voice must be a better thing to listen to than the Frenchman's. We did not get beyond the place where the four dukes went out to kill their enemy. I don't think that I remember whether they killed him or not."

"No, they did not manage it, but he gets killed. But that is one of the pleasant things in Dumas's books, murders do not seem like murders, and though you are enormously interested in what is done, you do not care enough about the actors to feel that any particular harm has been done."

"Ernest, a thought came to me last night. It has nothing to do with the book, but let me tell it to you. I wondered whether it seemed to you as strange as perhaps it is, that now I am strong enough to talk, I do not ask you to let me hear all that has been happening to you, and what all the mystery means. I began to tease myself with a fear—it was a very little fear, dear, and it is gone—I won't call it one, but I hoped that you would not believe that any thing that had grieved and troubled you could be a thing I could bear to let you have to yourself."

"That thought never came to me, Magdalen. But how did you drive it away?"

"May I say one word, and you will not be vexed—it is to make you know how happy I am?"

"Love."

"There has been a time then when I was not so sure of your love as I am now, Ernest."

"You are sure now?"

"Forever and forever. And that sureness brought the thought I am going to tell you. I lay and thought over the strange things that have separated us, and it seemed as strange as any of them that now that we are together again we should not talk them all over, and tell each other every thing that we have felt, and perhaps have owned to one another that we might have done something better."

"You could not, darling."

"Indeed yes, Ernest. Do you think I would have said that if I had meant you only? I ought to have borne up better, and have written to you oftener and more warmly, and have shown you that I felt—I did feel it, Ernest—that your trouble, whatever it was, came from your having married me. But I never was very cold, was I, dearest?—even into that last dreadful letter—

"You have kissed away the words, Sir, but I will speak. I am *not* thinking of it, darling. I was only going to say that even into that I slipped a little word which you read—I am sure you read it."

"Ah, and I think you would forgive me much if you could know how I read it."

"Did it please you—did it comfort you even for a moment? I am so thankful that I wrote it. For, Ernest dearest, I will tell you all the truth—I had almost thought that you would not care whether it was there or not. Are you angry?"

"Only with myself—never with you. Had you not a right to believe that, and far more?"

"No, and I never believed it, but I was very sad, and very ill, and I let the thought come to me. It is scared away for ever and ever. Let me tell my comforting thought that came to me last night after I had said my prayers. Why, I asked myself, are we thinking about the past and waiting a time to speak of it? Ernest knows all, and that is enough—are we not one? Was that a foolish, weak thought, coming from illness, or was it one of those things which the angels are sent to tell us when we have tried to come near them in prayer?"

"Believe that," he tenderly said, "and never part from that faith."

"And we are one?"

"It is my happiness that you know it, love."

"Then I will be good, and silent. Only, if you please, I do not think I wish to hear any more reading now. Yes, keep my hand, and let me close my eyes. Perhaps I will let myself sleep."

He had answered her from his heart, and he rejoiced in her frank and loyal love. But not with the fullness of rejoicing which he longed for. He felt that he had work to do before he

ANOTHER ENGAGEMENT.

could cast the world behind him, and repay her with fondness unshackled by a thought besides. His nature had been elevated by troubles, but he had lost the art which enables so many of us to bear up against them, the art of forgetting for the hour the cares of the next. He was deeply touched by his wife's affectionate confessions, but, having received them, and laid them up in his heart, Ernest longed for a summons to action.

He had speculated on various ways in which he might be invited to meet his enemy, but had not been prepared for that one in which the summons came.

Beccles's ingenuity—he was a great man for contrivances which were laughed at, and yet used with much comfort to the after-life of those who had laughed—had devised a little signal by which Ernest could be summoned from the room without the disturbance to Magdalen that would have been caused by a servant's entrance and message. It was but a card, tied to the end of a string, which passed under the door. The card lay where his eye, but not Magda-

len's, easily caught its movement by an unseen hand.

He read on, and suddenly the signal acted with so violent a jerk that Ernest knew no servant wanted him.

It was Mr. Conway, in much excitement.

He beckoned Ernest down stairs, and into the garden.

"Ernest Dormer," said Mr. Conway, "if I seem to speak angrily, you must forgive me. I am only too rejoiced to believe that you are an honest man. But you have been mixed up in some way with men who are not honest, but accursed scoundrels, and one of them is down here."

"I know it."

"And his business with me?"

"With you. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, seen him, and spoken to him, and have to see him again. He threw himself in my way in the street, introduced himself, and wished me to walk with him for a few minutes in the Castle ruins, as being out of the way. He looked very respectable—"

"No, no. If there is a mistake," said Ernest, between his teeth.

"Yes, professional, clean-shaven, smooth-faced—"

"Ha!" said Ernest, with a sudden relief, "of course he would do that. And I might have been deceived into letting him come into the house. Thank God, you have met him."

"You are so much in earnest that I don't make you the reply I might, namely, that your thankfulness seems a little out of place."

"You will not say that when I tell you that it is because Magdalen has escaped a possible danger. I mean that he might have sought me out here, and that our meeting might have caused her disturbance and alarm—but tell me what he said."

"The fellow—he gave his name as Davenport—apprised me that he had become possessed of a secret which, if revealed, would entail shame and sorrow upon me and mine. That you, Ernest Dormer, of whose return he was aware, had the key to the mystery, and therefore could tell me how dangerous it was, and he would spare me the detail unless I should fail in getting it from you. And he set a high price on his secret."

"Five thousand pounds?"

"Yes. Then you know of it, and what it means?"

"I do, indeed."

"And—and are we to pay the money?"

"Not a shilling, if it would save him, body and soul, from—"

The bell rang loudly, and Ernest rushed round to the gate, to open it, and to admit Mr. Haslop, Sergeant Penguin, and a third man whom Dormer did not recognize.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RUINS.

Mr. Haslop spoke first, and it was to ask, anxiously, for news of Magdalen. But when Ernest had said that his wife was, they hoped, and indeed believed, out of peril, and that she was allowed to talk with him, Penguin took his hand:

"Then, you have nothing to learn?"

"Every thing; and you have come to tell me something. I have something, also, for you. Dudley is here."

"We know that, and it is the reason why we are here," said Penguin. "The rest is for Mr. Haslop to say. I can hardly mistake in supposing that I meet Mr. Conway," he added, raising his hat.

"We got word," said Haslop, "that Dudley had been down for some days, but of course we know nothing of his purpose. Have you met him?"

"My father-in-law has just met him," said Ernest, "and is invited to meet him again, a pleasure which," he added, darkly, "I intend to ask him to resign in my favor." He then told them what had passed between Mr. Conway and Dudley.

"Once—seldom twice—in a man's life," said Haslop, "it happens to him to arrive so opportunely as I have done. When are you to see this man again, Mr. Conway?"

"You mention a name I do not know. This person I saw was good enough to say that he would wait for me one hour, in the ruins of our old castle here, and that if he did not then see me, he should conclude that I preferred receiving him at home. I understand nothing, gentlemen, of the mysterious story he told me, and you have interrupted Mr. Dormer, who was, I suppose, about to explain it to me."

Mr. Conway drew himself up, and spoke with irritation in his tone. He had been greatly and materially disturbed at the interview with the stranger, and the sudden arrival of the new visitors, who were apparently in the secret that had been withheld from him, did not tend to pacify him.

"Let us have all explanations in one," said Haslop; "where are these ruins?"

"You can see them from the road," said Dormer.

"Then we will go there together."

"I am not wanted, possibly," said Mr. Conway, trying to speak coldly.

"Indeed you are, Mr. Conway," said Haslop; "but do not let us lose time now."

"A moment," said Ernest Dormer, whom even the excitement of the hour could not make unmindful that Magdalen would wonder at his prolonged absence. He went back into the house, and sent Mrs. Conway to take his place by his wife's side.

"Now for the ruins," he said, coming out.

A walk of a few minutes, during which earnest words were exchanged between Dormer

and Haslop, the others keeping silence, and Sergeant Penguin, as usual, inspecting every thing and every body in his large manner, with the gold eye-glasses high in air, brought them to the old castle. Its few remaining portions had been utilized by a farmer, who rented the land, and they had been converted into sheds for the animals that grazed in the large green space, once the tilt-yard. A single tower, one side of which had crumbled away, leaving the chambers to be easily made out by the supports for the long-vanished floors, frowned on the desecrated halls, and remains of a wall which had escaped entire destruction marked out the area on two sides—the others were open, save that a badly-kept hedge prevented the wanderings of the cattle.

Pushing open a gate, Ernest led the way into the enclosure. At the opposite side he saw a man walking fast, and smoking.

"There is your friend," said Mr. Conway.

"That is not he," said Sergeant Penguin. "Much too respectable," he added, lowering his eye-glass.

"That is he," said Ernest, white with anger.

Any doubt was at once dispelled, for Mr. Davenport, on turning, and seeing the party advancing, gathered himself together, as it were, shook out the ashes from his pipe, and came up boldly to meet them.

"One spokesman," said Haslop, hastily. "Penguin, it is in your way."

"As you please," said the Sergeant, with secret gratification, for he loved to be in evidence. "Only, perhaps, Mr. Dormer—"

"I have not come to talk," said Ernest Dormer. "When you have done, it will be my turn."

"You have soon returned, Mr. Conway," said Mr. Dudley, as we may now call him to the end. "And you bring a worshipful company with you. I see that I am recognized by acquaintances. Sergeant Penguin and Mr. Haslop I also recognize. To see Mr. Dormer once is to remember him; but I have had the pleasure of seeing him twice—the second time, as he will recollect, in society which makes even Covent Garden pleasant."

"Dudley," said the Sergeant, "listen to me. The time for swagger and menace has gone by. Your game is up. The only question now to be decided is, whether we shall prosecute you, or let you leave the country."

"You speak to the purpose, sir, at all events. But as it is idle to deal with agents, when principals can be got at, I would suggest that you leave Mr. Dormer and Mr. Conway to finish the conversation with me. I have put Mr. Conway in possession of my views, and I am here to receive his answer. I agree in what you say about swagger and menace, in which no sensible man will try to rival Sergeant Penguin."

"Ha!" said the Sergeant, smiling. "I have seen bold men, and I have also seen them singularly and rapidly transformed into cowards, by the simple alchemy of a little truth. Mr. Dudley, you did not, it seems, explain yourself to Mr. Conway."

"No, Mr. Sergeant. I showed a consideration for his feelings, and I left explanation to his son-in-law."

"There has been no time to make it."

"Pray take any reasonable time," said Dudley, with a calm insolence. "I have not sought to hurry the gentleman."

"You desire no secrets, Mr. Dormer. I may say what seems useful, I suppose?"

Ernest Dormer made a sign of assent.

"Mr. Conway, it is not necessary to trouble you with all the details of a foul and scandalous story which this person, whose name is not Davenport, but Dudley, and who, where known at all is known most unfavorably, sought to establish, with the aid of a confederate who has had the grace to be ashamed of his work, and to abandon his share in the conspiracy."

Dudley listened to this exordium, which Penguin gave in his best manner, and not a shadow on the face of the former would have revealed that he was listening to a narrative affecting himself. He even nodded approvingly at the close of the advocate's sentence.

"But the basis of the slander," continued Sergeant Penguin, "was, that when the present Mrs. Dormer was unmarried, she paid repeated visits to the chambers of a young man in Gray's Inn, and I need not pain and shock you with the inference sought to be drawn from such alleged facts. I am obliged, however, to add, that the other witness, who has repented of his attempt, distinctly swore to certain familiarities, his account of which it might have been difficult to believe without admitting that conviction which this person desired to create."

"Distinctly swore to them," repeated Dudley, in a low voice, as wishing, however, that the point should make due impression.

"I say so," returned Penguin, looking at Dudley. "I say swore. That witness withdrew from the plot, which, you have perceived, Mr. Conway, simply means the extortion of money. But I assure Mr. Dudley, as well as yourself, that the man in question adheres to the statement which he made, and re-asserts its truth."

"Farquhar does that?" said Dudley, surprised. "Then I am sorry—no matter, go on, Mr. Sergeant."

"Farquhar, so the witness is named, Mr. Conway, does that. I forbear to remark upon Mr. Dudley's exhibition of remorse, or to inquire to what it refers, as that does not concern us. I merely say that Mr. Farquhar affirms that he has spoken the truth, and I believe that he has done so, in a sense."

"In a sense," broke in Dudley, who could not restrain his satisfaction at finding himself once more supported by evidence which he thought he had lost. "In a sense. You are a clever man, Sergeant Penguin, but you will have to talk a long time before you explain away the lady in the white lace scarf at Percy

Vaughan's window, and the affectionate embraces; and then we come to the murder, Sergeant Penguin."

"The murder!" gasped Mr. Conway, trembling like an aspen-leaf. "What terror next is to be coupled with the name of my child? Ernest," cried the old man, piteously, "I ought not to have been brought here."

"No," said Dudley, "you ought not, sir. It is not my fault that you are caused this suffering, which I deeply pity. Had your son-in-law and his advisers acted as kindly as I did, this scene would have been saved."

"We will play it out, however," said Sergeant Penguin.

Ernest Dormer had drawn close to Mr. Conway, and, with a kindly arm supporting the old man, spoke to him in a low voice. Conway looked up at him with a long gaze, as if seeking to discover whether Dormer's words were the truth or not. But Ernest's face was set as a flint.

"Now, Mr. Dudley, I offer you a last chance," said Penguin, impressively. "Down on your knees, confess your villainy, withdraw all charges, and beg our pardon, or take the consequences of your atrocious wickedness."

"Are you mad," said Dudley, with glistening eyes," to ask me to withdraw my charges when by your own mouth the chief of them is declared to be true?"

"I have not said that, Mr. Dudley. Now, Sir, thank yourself for all that may follow. We admit Miss Conway's visit to the chambers, we own to the white lace scarf, we declare that the embraces took place, and may have been witnessed. We do more—we produce the man."

Percy Vaughan stepped forward.

He was something changed in look from what he was when he entered the chambers of Mr. Haslop, on that long-past Sunday afternoon, to learn that his attempted forgery had failed, and that he must leave England forever. He had been a wanderer, but neither an aimless nor an unlucky wanderer, and his handsome face had lost none of the habit of self-assertion which Haslop then remarked. He was bronzed, and bearded, and his powerful hands had been browned by exposure. As he stood forward, Ernest Dormer thought that he had not often seen a man more likely to be a dangerous rival, and even at that moment he had time for a thought of pride that he had himself been preferred.

"I know nothing of this person," said Dudley, confronting the stranger, and smiling audaciously. "But if he is Mr. Vaughan, so much the better."

"I know him," said Mr. Haslop, "and have known him long. My voucher for his identity will, I doubt not, satisfy Mr. Conway."

"Well, and what has he to say?" demanded Dudley.

"This," said Vaughan, in a voice which, in its first tones, told Dudley that he was to hear no good thing. "Had I known of this devil's work that has been going on, I would have been in England in time to save this Dudley a journey to Naybury. But I am here, and that is enough. His game is over. I have read the precious story which he has concocted out of the fall of that wretched Barton and the spying of that more wretched Farquhar. In every sense in which it can affect the honor of a lady, it is from beginning to end a most infernal lie."

"You may bring this old tower down if you talk so loud," scoffed Dudley. "It is easier to call names than to convince those gentlemen," he pointed to Ernest and Mr. Conway, "that they can do better than accept my terms."

"I will see to that," said Percy Vaughan. "You and I have an account to settle. But first we will clear away your lies. Mr. Dormer, it is perfectly true that Mrs. Dormer, then Miss Conway, did me the great honor of a visit to my chambers—one visit only, and it was a marriage visit."

"Doubtless," said Dudley.

"A marriage visit. Mr. Dormer is, I have no doubt, aware that I was fortunate enough to render Miss Conway a service which she never forgot. It is not impossible that he may have been told—her nature was the most frank and beautiful that I ever knew—that for the very shortest possible time I was mad enough to think that I might succeed in obtaining more than gratitude. My folly was made clear to me in a few moments, which I would not forget if I could, for they taught me how a noble woman can reject without wounding. A wild dream was over, I addressed myself to my profession, and I found a wife who is very dear to me. I have now to accuse myself of a real crime."

"I thought we should come to it at last," muttered Mr. Dudley.

"It need not be spoken of," said Mr. Haslop. "I detected it before it could do harm, and Mr. Vaughan left England."

"But not until I had married," said Percy Vaughan. "Mr. Haslop's liberality enabled me to offer myself at once to a penniless girl, who would have waited my time, but who joyfully agreed to go abroad with me, and has made me the best of wives. Miss Conway saw her once, and it was on her wedding-day. That day Miss Conway honored us by coming to our rooms, and she wore the white lace scarf of which you have heard. She brought us two presents, that scarf for my wife, and for me a locket which I hope may be given to me again when its strange history shall be cleared.

"Of my four rooms," continued Percy Vaughan, "those up stairs were the lightest and pleasantest, and—"

"Four rooms?" said Dudley, coarsely. "I have looked over the chambers you had, for I once thought of taking them. There are two rooms, one back, one front, and a sort of clerk's closet. If you are going in for an alibi, don't tell me what I can contradict at the outset."

"Ah!" said Penguin, "I was never more ashamed of myself than when I learned how I had overlooked that chamber arrangement. I had it before my eyes, too. After the body of

the poor fellow had been taken away, I went and read the names on the door-way of your house. I read who dwelt on the first, second, and top floor. I never thought of the third. That might be passed; but the other day, and after this business had begun, I go and read the list again, see that the third floor is filled up, and it never occurs to me to remember what as a Bencher I might have recollected, namely, that we gave orders last year to take away the inside staircase that joined the two floors, and to let the chambers separately. When you said last night that you had two sets, I thought what idiots we clever fellows are."

"The knowledge would have been of no use," said Vaughan, "without my explanation. In the front room, below, I used to work, but no one else entered it—Mr. Haslop guesses why. The back room, below, was a sitting-room, and there, on the day I speak of, we received Miss Conway. She was never on the upper floor at all."

"Ah!" said Dudley.

"No, you scoundrel," said Percy Vaughan, turning savagely upon him, "your witness was deceived. The scarf, Mr. Dormer, was presented to my wife, and she, girl-like, instantly flew up stairs to array herself in it at the glass, and, bride-like, called me up to see her in the beautiful gift. The embraces spoken of were hers and mine on our bridal-day."

"Haslop told me this as we came along," said Ernest Dormer to Mr. Conway; "but do you think I wanted exculpation for my wife?"

"And poor Barton was not flung down," jeered Dudley, "and did not die in my surgery telling me what he had seen, and giving me the locket which Mr. Dormer has so wisely kept."

"I would have flung him down without pity, and remembered it without remorse," said Vaughan, fiercely, "if I could thereby have saved Miss Conway from this cruelty. But he was simply a thief. I had laid that locket near the window, and as we were descending the stairs I suddenly recollected and went back for it. You lie, Dudley, or rather you put a lie into the dead man's mouth. He never saw my wife. But he saw me, a moment too late. I dashed at him to regain the locket, and he went over the parapet, to be used by you for this scoundrel end."

"You speak loud, as I said before. But the facts speak louder, and all your noise will not make our friends here believe your version. And when we talk of credible witnesses, we do not mean men who are obliged to fly the country for crime, and who re-appear for money, as no doubt is your case."

"I have prospered, gentlemen," said Percy Vaughan, quietly. "Mr. Haslop's aid enabled me to become a partner in a lucrative business in Germany. I changed my name, and hence the delay in tracing me, but in one hour from receiving his message, I was on my way to England."

"That I know," said Mr. Haslop.

"Let me add, Mr. Dormer, that my wife's eagerness that I should hurry over to bear my testimony was as great as my own. She will follow me, if you think it needful to have her present. Even in the haste of departure she did not forget to give me the copy of the marriage certificate, and its date will have an interest for you—will you read it?"

"It is needless," said Ernest Dormer. "I know that every syllable of what you say is the truth. Is the date the sixth of August?"

"The sixth of August," said Sergeant Penguin, who had instinctively snatched at the document. "We have heard much of that date, Mr. Dudley."

"And you will hear more, depend upon it, Mr. Sergeant. If our positions were reversed I should like nothing better than to hear you deal with this witness, this returned felon, whom Mr. Haslop, the friend of the lady who is accused, introduces so luckily at the nick of time with a pretty bridal story and a forged certificate."

"Mr. Vaughan's occupancy of the four rooms can be proved at the office of the Treasurer of the Inn," said Mr. Haslop.

"And the *two* ladies remained there," said Dudley ironically, "or did they come to the front, and look down upon the body of Andrew Barton, and see me taking him away? That must have been a pleasant incident in their lives, and they must have told their two husbands of it."

"Neither knew any thing of the incident," said Percy Vaughan. "I am not in the habit of losing my head, and making things worse than they were. Nor would I have let my wedding-day be marked, for my wife, with the memory of a death, though unintentionally caused. Miss Conway never, I have said, came upon the upper floor, and my wife had gone down a minute before Barton appeared. I had presence of mind enough to keep them in the sitting-room until long after the crowd had dispersed. But I saw you, Dudley, stooping by the man, and I saw you, Sergeant Penguin, come up to the door-way, where you remained some time talking to a porter."

"I did; and I went over the names, and never thought of the set of chambers on the third floor, between Orbit & Wheeler, the engineers, and yourself."

"Then, gentlemen," said Mr. Dudley, "am I to accept this pleasant interchange of recollections—it only needs the presence of the ladies to make it perfect—am I, I ask, to accept this as the answer to my demand? I have laid before you a statement, supported by evidence on oath, and sealed with the blood of a murdered man. You meet it with a tale of back rooms and bridal veils, and the word of an exiled criminal. This is the answer, is it?"

"Not quite all," said Sergeant Penguin; "but suppose we stopped there, have you any rejoinder?"

"None for this place."

"Any further menace?"

"That is my affair. I have dealt frankly and

openly heretofore. I have been met by trick of every kind, and I shall now proceed without the formality of warning. I shall regret any unhappy results, but they will not be of my causing."

He spoke defiantly; but his eye had little defiance in it, and it wandered from one face to another, instead of gazing with his accustomed insolent stare on the person he addressed. He felt that his scheme had broken down, that he was utterly defeated, that his enemies had resolved on accepting Percy Vaughan's narrative, and that he had no chance of working on Mr. Conway, now surrounded and supported by stronger men than himself.

A stranger in a strange place, unhelped, and in the presence of four men who were there to crush him, Dudley still held his own. But he would gladly have slunk away. Three of the four men around him were prosperous men—men of honor. The fourth was prosperous also, and spoke in the tone of one for whom the world was servant, not master. And they looked at him scornfully, yet vigilantly, as at a stunned serpent that might rouse itself, and must be sticken again.

His cherished dream was broken, and the gods had reverted to their old sport.

"Then, Mr. Dudley," said Penguin, "we are not to understand that you abandon that wicked and preposterous charge, and renounce the idea of extortion?"

"Understand what you please. It is not probable that I shall again apply to any person present," said Dudley, sullenly.

"Not for bail, I fancy," said Sergeant Penguin, with a laugh.

Dudley gave no reply, except a contemptuous look.

"It is no business of mine, Dudley," continued Penguin, whom silence irritated more than any retort. "But we have had some passages of arms together, and I have a sort of pity for you, for which I must apologize to my friends here. Let me give you the assurance that bail will not be taken, and therefore you had better make the necessary arrangements for going to prison."

"What is this?" said Ernest Dormer, suddenly. "No arrest must take place without my sanction. Surely you all see that I am the person to decide on the next step, I, whose wife has been maligned."

There was a deadly purpose in Ernest Dormer's manner, though he spoke with self-control.

"You were not wrong, Haslop," said Penguin, significantly.

"I was right," said Haslop, "and I am sorry that it is so. Dormer," he said, "will you walk aside with me for a few moments?"

"By and by, as much as you will. Now, I have only to request that you will all three withdraw, and leave me to speak to Mr. Dudley."

"I will not be left with him," said Dudley, with a sudden and ghastly fear upon him.

For he remembered the last words that Ernest Dormer had said when Dudley had revealed to him the foul story.

And he had come to that meeting unarmed. And he felt that Ernest Dormer could not know this, but would remember that old boast of means of defense, and would have armed himself. Had Dudley come to die beside those ruins? He ground his teeth in rage at the thought of his folly, and then again he said—

"That man swore my death in case my story should be untrue. He believes it untrue, and he has come here to kill me. You are conspirators, accomplices, if you do not deliver me out of his hand."

"A dastard, too," said Penguin. "I said so."

"No," said Dormer, "he is not a dastard. He is a scoundrel, but the man who, after our first and last interview, until to-day, would persevere in his plot against my wife, is no mere coward. Nor is he showing cowardice now—better men have shown more when confronted with men they have wronged. Mr. Conway, will you conduct our friends home?"

"Dormer," said Haslop, "are you mad? For what purpose should you be left with this man?"

"Suppose," said Ernest, calmly, "that although I have no doubt of the truth of the explanations that have been given, there is a point or two on which I could wish to be satisfied, and I might, in private, be able to induce Mr. Dudley to clear up a doubt or so."

"You doubt nothing," cried Dudley, "and I will not be left with you." And he drew near to the side of his most merciless enemy, Penguin, who, in turn, drew away.

"Ernest," said Mr. Conway, who had long been a silent but an agitated witness, "even I, who have been wounded to the very soul by what I have heard this day, I would ask you not to sully the happiness with which we have received Mr. Vaughan's statement. Do not give way to any violence."

"Before I left home," said Ernest Dormer, thoroughly master of his voice, if the mastery went no further, "my wife was listening to a French story of the way in which four men went out to destroy one enemy. The odds made the act seem cowardly. We are four to one here, and we have destroyed our enemy. Before we begin to feel that we are too many, let us leave him. I ask only a few moments' talk with him."

"You shall not have one," said Haslop. "He is the Queen's prisoner."

"What do you mean?"

"Ah!" said Penguin, "I can not see very well at that distance; but," he added, gazing toward the gate of the field, "here comes one who I suppose will explain."

A man was seen running toward them.

"It was for your sake," said Haslop to Dormer, in hurried accents.

"What—what was?"

"Do you think I had forgotten what you said to me at the hotel, and how you had planned a death upon the glacier for yourself? I know the devilish intention which now sways you, but you will live to thank God that I stayed your hand. Come on, man," said Haslop, impatiently, as if the new-comer could hear him, or as if he could have mended his pace, which was rapid.

"This is the officer," said Haslop. "We got the warrant, and it has been duly confirmed here—that kept us late—Dudley is this man's prisoner."

"This man's?" said Ernest, with a smile, which faded from his face the next instant, as he saw the expression on that of the new arrival. It was Mr. Beccles.

Beccles was among them the next moment. He had run well, but was not exhausted, and it cost him little effort to speak.

"Mr. Dormer, my errand is to you."

"You come from the house—my wife—"

"It is her message—am I in time?"

"For what—for what?" said Ernest, vehemently. "She is not worse?"

As he spoke, his hand fell to his pocket—it was no involuntary movement. Had Mr. Beccles answered yes, that which it had been bad to do had been done before Dormer had rushed away to Magdalen's side.

"No," said Beccles. "But come this way."

He drew Ernest aside, and said—

"I called as usual—you were away—you ought not to have been away. I care not for the cause, your place was there. But she sends you this message, and if you disobey it in the least jot or tittle I warn you that you will be her murderer—I don't pick terms, and she is an angel."

"The message?"

"It is this, and again I warn you to obey it, if you would not lose the woman who sends it. 'Tell him that I know all, and that if he believes that I am good, he will forgive. And bring him home to say that he has forgiven.' Do you understand that message?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"I understand it only too well."

"Then, mind, I shall remember that you owned it, and the rest be upon your own head," said Beccles, bluntly.

"You love her, and your words can not anger me," said Ernest, laying his hand on the shoulder of the Doctor. "But she lays a heavy burden on me."

"I am sure you have no bad news," said Mr. Conway, who had been watching them intently, but who had been somewhat calmed by a re-assuring gesture from Beccles, as he led Ernest away.

"No, nothing of the kind," said the Doctor, eying the group with curiosity. "Are you exploring our ruins, gentlemen? You could not be in better hands than Mr. Conway's, or it would be pleasant to me to offer any information in my power."

"In point of fact, Sir," said Sergeant Penguin, upon whom, as the largest of the party, the Doctor's eye had chiefly rested, "we have been engaged in a discussion on a ruin, but not that of Naybury. But—"

"A word," said Ernest Dormer, coming back into the midst of the group. "Haslop, you said that a warrant was out for the apprehension of this person, and I take it for granted that you are in earnest."

"Thoroughly, and as you know why it was issued, you may be sure that our friend, Sergeant Penguin, has taken care that it shall be duly framed. I thought it had arrived, but it can not be long; and until Mr. Dudley is in the hands of justice, I shall protect him from any others."

"He is safe from me, Haslop, and the warrant must not be executed."

"Better that it should be," said Penguin, with a sidelong look at Dormer.

"You do not know me so well as Haslop does, though you have known me longer," said Ernest. "When I have said that this man is safe, you might leave him with me in a desert. But he is more than safe."

"I am without a weapon of any kind," said Dudley. "It was not always so, but it is so to-day; and when your officers search me they will see that I came to this meeting without protection against violence."

"I am glad of that," said Ernest Dormer. Haslop, perhaps, understood him.

"There was no danger of violence, Mr. Dudley," said Haslop. "It was my business to see that none was offered, for the sake of one whom you have nearly killed, and who, if I read matters aright, has sent from what is perhaps her dying-bed to save you."

"It is so," said Ernest Dormer. "Listen, scoundrel! Mr. Haslop is wrong in saying that there was no danger of violence, for it was certain until five minutes back. It had been my intention to be alone with you, and to have said that—or, if necessary, done that—which would have made you turn upon me, murderously, and I knew that you carried arms. Then, I should have done my best. I believe that I should have avenged myself. And, again, had Mr. Beccles's errand been to tell me that your devilish machinations had robbed me of my wife, I would have dealt you one blow that should have left you little power to exult over me. I say this, not in boast, but that you, base and lying wretch that you are, may comprehend how you have been saved. It is as Mr. Haslop has said. My wife, your victim, has charged me, as I believe in her innocence, to pardon your guilt. Go! and when you are reduced to the beggary you deserve, ask Mr. Haslop to help you—he will do so for me, and be glad, though not so glad," he added, turning to Haslop, "as he is now."

"No," said Haslop, with glistening eyes.

"By Jove! you are in luck, Dudley," jeered Penguin. "Thank the gods, if you know any,

and then run like the devil, who knows you. For that is the only way to escape a magistrate's warrant, which has been sent down into Naybury for your arrest.

"I *am* in luck," said Benjamin Dudley, suddenly regaining all his boldness, and confronting them, unabashed. "I believed that a truthful story like mine would not be swept away like a stage plot, and that when I pressed it home, the truth would be admitted by one who knows it best. I had but to lay the story before Mrs. Dormer, and let her see that I was in earnest about it, and my work was done. She sends her husband orders to pardon me, and he orders his friend to pay me. We will not haggle over words. She is a wise woman, and he is a wise man, and Mr. Haslop shall have an early call from me. My price will ensure my silence."

Beccles, close to Ernest, laid so firm a hold on him, that before he could rush forward, another voice spoke.

"I will ensure your silence," said Percy Vaughan. "While away, I have been branded by you as a murderer. That should pass; but the woman you have slandered sends me no message to forgive her wrongs, and I do not. As you say, you work is done."

The report of a small pistol echoed through the ruins of the old castle.

Percy Vaughan had taken rapid but fatal aim, and Dudley, with a ball in his brain, reeled, and fell on his face.

"This is a murder," exclaimed Beccles, who, with the instinct of his noble calling, was instantly by the fallen man's side.

"This may be," said Vaughan, "but Barton's death was not. As there is a God in heaven, Ernest Dormer, that man lied."

"He will lie no more," said Beccles, bending over him, as Dudley, when first he came upon our scene, had bent over Barton.

The retribution brought back that original group to the eye of one of that party—to the eye of him whose hand had brought that retribution about.

They hastily gathered around the dead, but a brief gaze was enough. When they stood up and looked in each other's faces, one man was gone.

Percy Vaughan has never been seen again by any of the men who on that day stood under the old ruins. But he escaped from England, and found means to apprise Haslop that he had done so, and would not be tracked again.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"THOSE DEAR FLOWERS."

"I AM here again, love," said Ernest Dormer, as he resumed his wonted place.

Magdalen laid her hand in his.

"Were you very angry with me, for sending you such a message by Mr. Beccles? Say you were not very angry."

"Supposing that it were not true to say so?" asked Ernest.

She did not answer, but the sweet blue eyes sought his face—not anxiously, but with a serene expression which they had not lately worn.

"No," he answered. "I was not angry, love. But I should speak untruly if I said that I had not wished your message had been later. But that is all over now. Tell me, how came you to send—I mean, to know any thing that should make you send?"

"Ah, Sir! you have married a Lady Fine-ear, who can tell what is going on at a great distance," said Magdalen, smiling, "I heard the voice of Mr. Haslop in the garden, and a loud voice—you are going to tell me whose—and you were all speaking mysteriously, and you all went out together. But you sent up mamma to me, and I heard from her that there were two strangers, and she was agitated, but indeed I did not ask her why. Then I knew that it was something about our story, and Mr. Beccles had seen you all going to the Castle. He thought that it was only a visit to the ruins, and that you were showing them to friends; but I knew, Ernest, that you would not have left me for that. Did Beccles give you my charge?"

"He did, faithfully. But what, my darling, made you think it necessary, or that there was any one to forgive?"

"You did. You went out with an angry eye and a stern mouth, like a man who is going to avenge himself on an enemy. Was it not so?"

"It was so—at least, I went out intending to chastise an enemy."

"Him who has said the cruel things of me?"

"Yes. Shall I tell you of him?"

"Tell me that you granted my petition to you."

"Nay, love, it was a command, and it was obeyed."

"Fully and willingly, Ernest?"

"Unwillingly—which gives value to the obedience. Fully, more fully than in obedience to your words, for I went further, and offered the man money. But the merit of the deed is all your own, love."

"And you wish that it had been undone?"

"No," said Ernest, "a thousand times no! I rejoice that it was done. And now shall we be silent about it, for I must not let you forget that you are weak?"

"I am not weak, dear. At least, I am getting stronger every hour. And I should be so glad to know why you rejoice. He has been penitent, perhaps, and has made amends?"

"Yes, he has made amends—all the amends which he can make in this world. I have forgiven him, and we need name him no more."

"You are keeping something back from me, Ernest, and you mean to be very kind. Did I not tell you that we were one, and I did not seek to know any thing more than you pleased to tell me? You believe me good—I know that,

and that is all. If I say to you that your speech means more than it says, it is only to show you how I watch your voice. And who have come down to see you from London, and who is the gentleman that talks so loud?"

"That is Sergeant Penguin, the great advocate. If you were well, I should like you to see him; he would amuse you much by his perfect disbelief in any thing good, while he is always doing good things—his coming down here, for instance, in the middle of his business, was a great proof of good nature. So, indeed, was Mr. Haslop's; but then he is an old friend of yours, and bound to look after you, whereas Penguin is only a sort of club friend of mine, and not at all bound to me."

He made a long speech of this, in the hope of getting Magdalen away from another question. But it came.

"And who is the other stranger?"

"I fear to startle you, Magdalen, my darling, and yet I hate to prolong mysteries. He came for a good purpose, and he is gone away again. It was Percy Vaughan."

Ernest threw his arm around her, and was ready to support her in case the mention of a name connected with two terrible episodes in her life should cause her sudden agitation. But she smiled, quietly, as one who was comforted, not surprised, by news.

"Yes," she said, "I thought that you would have him home at last. The not being able to find him was the difficulty that kept you away so long, or perhaps he was afraid of coming to England. It was quite right that you should try to question him, and yet, Ernest, I never told you an untruth, or refused to answer a question, did I? Or if I did, it must have been in playfulness."

"And can my wife find no loving reason for my silence to her?"

"I know not what you mean, dear. Yet forgive me, Ernest, before I say it—have you forgiven me?"

"Yes—yes—any thing."

"Day by day, as my head gets clearer, a hard light seems to come to me. But mind, love, it is thrown only on what is past and gone. You love me now—I know you do—yes, tell it so, but you need not. I know it—I am happy. But you did not love me well, then, Ernest, or you would never have kept this thing from me, and sought knowledge of strangers. It was a kind and delicate thought that made you conceal a shameful charge from me, but it was not love, Ernest. You would not conceal it *now*, my own one, were you to hear it now for the first time?"

"I would not. No, not for worlds. Do not say that I did not love you, Magdalen. I always loved you; but it was truer to say that when I did not trust you with this secret, I did not know you, and what you call a kind and delicate thought was but a shallow excuse to myself—I never offered it to you. We have opened our hearts to each other now—and they will never close again."

"And the poor miserable people who have sought to injure us—we owe them gratitude for what they have done. They have married us, Ernest."

"Yes. But I have no gratitude for them. Now, I have more to tell you, and you are brave and strong, and I will not keep it back, or run the risk of letting you hear it from another. For the last time, I hope, a scoundrel's name must be recalled to you. In the accursed letter that was sent to you from London, the name of Dudley occurs as that of chief slanderer. He sent you the letter. His object was to make us all believe that he could substantiate a scandalous story, which we should give him money to suppress."

"And the story was about poor me. I never could understand what they charged; but, Ernest, I read over and over that I was kissed and embraced."

Crimsoning as she spoke, she half whispered the rest.

"Do I not know it?—would I not swear it before all the world? But we know now on what show of truth the story of his was built. A young lady *was* embraced, and she wore a white lace scarf."

"Percy Vaughan's dear little wife," laughed Magdalen. "I know of the scarf, of course, for I gave it her as her wedding present; but she did not tell me of the caress—do young wives speak of such things?" she added, archly, but again the color rose slightly.

"Not wives like my Magdalen."

His Magdalen remained silent for some moments, and then, looking affectionately at him, said—

"And is this the dreadful story which was told of me?"

"There is some more, dear, but that matters little; and there is the end of all things to be told. Mr. Haslop contrived to recall this Mr. Percy Vaughan to England, and he was brought down here to confront Dudley. They met in our presence to-day. Vaughan's explanations utterly routed Dudley, and a quarrel followed. Vaughan fired a pistol, and wounded the other man mortally."

"He is dead?" asked Magdalen, trembling.

"He is dead."

"Ernest, how horrible! It seems impossible that you should have been at such a fearful thing, and be talking of it calmly to me—letting me laugh, and speak nonsense. Surely I am not dreaming?"

"It is all true, darling. Your slanderer has met his fate at the hand of the man whose name he sought to mix up wickedly with yours."

"You told me that you had forgiven him, Ernest," said Magdalen, anxiously, solemnly, and clasping her hands.

"I had forgiven him. I will tell you more. He spurned my forgiveness, and treated it as a proof that we were afraid to defy him. The deed that removed him was a grim one, Magdalen, but he deserves no pity."

"Oh! do not say that; do not say that.

What abject misery and humiliation must a poor wretch have undergone before he could be driven to try to wring money from the friends of a girl whom he never saw, who never harmed him. You would have given him money, Ernest, if he had lived? Say that."

"I told him that Mr. Haslop would be my almoner. He scoffed, and implied that he should have much larger sums than charity would give."

"And it might have saved his life—his soul—if his terms had been granted," said Magdalen, in a low voice. "He has been driven to a mad quarrel, and where is he now?"

"And you speak, Magdalen, of the man whose plot might have estranged us forever," said Ernest Dormer.

"No," said Magdalen, gently. "God would not have permitted that, love. It was not to be. But it is fearful to think that this wretched creature has been hunted to his grave. And Percy Vaughan, with such guilt upon his soul—is he—is he in prison, Ernest?"

"He escaped, while we were attending to the wounded man. I trust that he will elude any search for him, and get home to the wife of whom he speaks so warmly."

"The poor, dear little wife! And her husband a murderer! Oh! Ernest, Ernest, what dreadful things have joined themselves to our lives!"

And she laid her head on his bosom, trembling and weeping.

"All this could not have been kept from you, Magdalen," he said, soothingly, "or it might have been better. But ere this it is the talk of Naybury, and will be the talk of the country. Happily, the witnesses to the act are men who will know how much evidence is due from them, and how much may be passed over. Yet, I fear, love, that it will be many a day before our connection with the fate of this man will be forgotten. But that must not trouble you, my own Magdalen. We may leave this place, after a time, and forget its miseries. Meantime, we must have you brightening and strengthening. You are not all your own now, nor even all mine, darling."

Her fair arms clasped his neck, and drew his lips to her own.

It was as Ernest Dormer had supposed. The inquest on Dudley was duly held, and the evidence of the chief witnesses was discreetly given. It is not impossible that, but for the high character of those witnesses, and the adroit management of the coroner, who was personally acquainted with Mr. Conway, and, of course, with Mr. Beccles, even a country jury might have insisted on being allowed to come a little more behind the scenes than was necessary for the purposes of justice. One or two spiteful persons in Naybury did hint, that if four men surrounded a fifth, and permitted him to be shot down by a sixth, who was allowed to escape, they ought to be able to give a very good reason for not being treated as accomplices. But character and tact won the day, and a verdict which charged Percy Vaughan with the offense was promptly obtained, and—as it happened—no injustice was done. Dudley was buried in Naybury church-yard, and the newly-arrived curate, who returned thanks that his brother had been delivered out of the miseries of this sinful world, was happily ignorant of the additions to those miseries which had been caused by the sinful brother for whose release he expressed gratitude. Mr. Haslop, for some unassigned reason, which probably Magdalen might have comprehended more readily than others, chose to remain and attend the funeral of Dudley. Mr. Sergeant Penguin, it need hardly be said, was moved by no kindred impulse to be present at that ceremony, but soon returned to London, having addressed to the Conway and Dormer family his heartiest congratulations upon the way in which an unpleasant business had been brought to a close. The Sergeant felt what he said, and would certainly not have understood the look with which Magdalen received from her mother an account of his parting words. But, in the mystic language of an old west-country ballad—

> "If all the world were of one religion,
> Every living thing would die."

Dudley's patients and customers missed him but little. But a sensation was created by an incident which occurred in his house, and which afforded matter of discussion in Lancaster Street and its neighborhood for many a day after the name of "Mr. B. Dudley" had been obliterated.

His shop and the parlor in the rear have been described. Beyond the latter, a flight of steep steps led from a door in the parlor down into a sort of cellar, where the larger and coarser articles of Dudley's trade were kept. A kind of draw-bridge, or falling flap, hid the stairs, and afforded a path to the leads over the cellar, which was of great depth, and received its small share of day-light from the narrow opening between itself and the house. There was nothing in the cellar of sufficient value to induce its careless owner to close its door, which, indeed, had fallen from one hinge, and disclosed the blackness of the cavern. On the leads stood a few flower-pots, grimed, dingy, and for the most part holding the deadest of departed shrubs, the barest sticks of what had once been flower-trees; but in one or two cases, by some strangely-clinging vitality, there were weeds as green as weeds may be in such an atmosphere. The whole array had belonged to a poor little school-boy, who had met with a frightful street accident, and whose friends had lodged him in a back room in that dreary house, that he might have the attendance of Dudley—the best they could afford for the child—and there he had wasted away, not unkindly tended by the rough apothecary. When the boy died—which he did smiling, and thanking all who had helped him to the end of his little life—and the landlady of the house

was about to consign the flower-pots to the dust-bin, Dudley swore at her horribly, and with his own hands carried them to his own leads, and once or twice watered the flowers; but they were soon forgotten.

He had now been absent many days, and no news had been received of him at his house. This excited no particular attention, his wayward habits having accustomed his landlady to his absences. Had she been a regular reader of the papers, she would have seen an account of the inquest, but she was not a woman of the reading sort, and at the time she had no lodgers who might have informed her of the affair. Mrs. Faunt was the only other inmate.

Mrs. Faunt was undecided as to her course. She had revenged herself on her friend Dudley by the *coup* which destroyed his case before the lawyer, but he was unaware of her treachery, and she had still an intention of making him useful or profitable to her. And, strange as it may seem to those who ignore our strangely mixed influences, Mrs. Faunt, in spite of her fierce wrath with Dudley, and her malice against him for the especial crime of the false photograph and the imaginary tombstone, had retained a grim sort of regard for her old friend, accomplice and enemy. He had shared in so much wickedness, almost as much as she had, and so many of those whom they had known in old days had come to sorry ends, that she clung a little to this stalwart survivor. If he would not be extraordinarily brutal, she thought, she might as well live out her time in the house in Lancaster Street as go elsewhere. Naybury had become useless to her, and there were few other places that attracted her, and two or three where, for good reasons, her residence would be unpleasant. She would at least await Dudley's return to town. Where he had gone she did not know, but on the suspicion that it was to Naybury, had conveyed that idea to Mr. Penguin's clerk. But Mr. Penguin had received a more definite intimation from a more respectable source.

It was a Sunday afternoon, and the landlady, after ministering to Mrs. Faunt's necessities and luxuries, had, with that lady's assent, departed to Greenwich to see a grandchild which had just been vaccinated: a mission which may not seem important to the lofty-minded, but which is regarded as a duty and a pleasure by the humble. They had arranged that Mrs. Faunt was not to sit up for her friend; and as there were two keys to the street-door, each woman could be out, independently, and the one flat candle in the passage was to denote that the other inmate had retired to bed.

The house being left to Mrs. Faunt, and that person having taken her usual and not inconsiderable quantity of fluid refreshment, she began to feel, as she stated to herself, lonesome and pathetic. A dull Sunday afternoon in an empty house in a dingy street near Holborn does present a combination of dreariness which might damp the soul of a person of amplest resources, and in an old woman in the state approaching to the maudlin it was not surprising that the circumstances had an effect. Vainly did she seek consolation in the glass: the liquor refused to intoxicate her, but only made her more and more conscious that she was a lonely, evil, old, neglected, despised, miserable woman.

While in this mood, Mrs. Faunt happened to look out at a back window, and she beheld the weeds that flourished in the pots of the poor little dead school-boy. Perhaps, in the circumstances, they seemed to her more, and greener, than they really were. But they sent a rush of rural feeling to her heart, and rendered her so sentimental that she declared to herself that she must go out and put her lips to those dear flowers.

"His shutters'll be shut, though," said Mrs. Faunt, "so I'll take a candle."

Mr. Dudley's door was locked, but that form presents small obstacles to a London landlady, and this one had no secrets from her friend. Mrs. Faunt was soon in Dudley's parlor, reading the largely-scrawled order which he had indited to the effect that nothing was to be touched.

"That shows he expected people to walk in, or it stands to reason that he would not have written it," remarked Mrs. Faunt, who, like many other persons, grew argumentative when she had disqualified herself for argument.

There was nothing however, to invite her to appropriation, at which it was not in her way to hesitate. Not even a drop of liquor left in the chipped decanter. Dudley had needed no teaching to drink deep ere he departed.

So Mrs. Faunt unbolted the door leading to the leads, and again beheld the herbage which she coveted to smell.

The old creature smiled foolishly at the object of her desire. And it was her last smile in this world. Dudley, as a sort of protection against thieves, had removed the falling flap, or draw-bridge, and Mrs. Faunt did not notice that he had done so, and she stepped forward.

The next moment she was lying in a heap, rolled some distance into the dark cellar, with limbs and ribs fractured by the successive blows from the stairs, and with her head terribly gashed by the final fall.

How long a time that miserable old woman passed while her evil soul was departing none can say. Nor were it a healthy thing to speculate on the thoughts, each a terror, that may have come to her in that awful hour. We have done with her, and it is enough to say that thus ended a life at whose nature the artist has but dared to hint, and whose darker features are not even to be hinted at in days like these. But her race has flourished, before and since the days of Clarissa, and is not extinct. Enough of Charity Faunt. Leave her dead at the foot of the snare unconsciously set for her by the dead man.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BROKEN EGG.

"MU-*THER!*" exclaimed Gracie Clare. We remember her favorite imitation of the yelp of a street brat—she had once given it in the hearing of a dramatic author, and he had inserted it in a play, and the play had run two hundred and seventy-nine nights in consequence—"Mu-*ther!*"

"What next, Jenny?" was the demand from the shop.

"Come up instantly if the Archbishop of Canterbury is cheapening your potatoes."

No such distinguished customer was below, but Mrs. Nobb, accustomed to obey her loving but imperious child, consigned her trade to the care of another of the series of unfaithful assistants, and went up stairs.

"Mother," exclaimed Gracie, who was in extreme dishabille, and whose pretty feet were in slippers, but not in stockings, "what do you think?"

"I think you'll catch cold, child. What do you read the paper for until you're dressed?"

"Never mind that, you old thing, but, who do you think's dead? You'll never guess."

"Then I won't try, Jenny," replied her mother, throwing a shawl over her child's plump shoulders.

"Old Faunt."

Mrs. Nobb's surprise took the form of an exclamation.

"Well, yes," said Gracie, "I suppose that's the party interested. But, upon second thoughts, mother, never let me hear such an expression proceed from your young lips again. Tumbled down some steps, and broken her neck."

"And served her precious right," said Mrs. Nobb, who, not having been classically educated, knew no rule enjoining her to begin sparing a person's character the moment it ceased to be of any consequence what one said of it. "Precious right. I always said she would come to grief one of these days. Read about it, Jenny; I've left my glasses in the basin of peas I was shelling."

Miss Clare read out, exceedingly well, a paragraph in which was announced the discovery of the body, on the day following that of the death.

"She was a bad one," was Mrs. Nobb's comment. "A very bad one. A worse one than you can understand, my girl. But that's a fearful way of going out of the world, and though I don't say it was too bad for her, as Providence knows best about that, I wish she could have had time to repent a bit, if it was ever so little."

The poor woman was evidently shocked, and Gracie, who was not shocked in the least, forebore from the sort of remark with which she was accustomed to tease her parent.

"Yes, it is shocking," said Grace. "And you had words with her."

"Which, if it was to-morrow, I would have over again," said Mrs. Nobb, "and may be hotter. But that don't make it different. I should like to go round and look at the place. I dare say they'd show it me, as having know'd her in life."

"There's sure to be a bobby as is ready for a bob," said Miss Clare, quoting a music-hall lyric. "I'll treat you, mother; there's my money. Only don't ask me to go. I suppose I ought to feel something, but I give you my word of honor I don't."

"Why ought you to feel, child? You cut her, as I told you to do, and there was an end."

"Yes, with me. But I got her served out for all that. I don't know how, and I never asked, but I told a gentleman, a friend of mine, that you wouldn't stand my doing any thing, so he took it on himself, and he isn't a man to do things by halves. I mustn't tell his name, so don't ask me, but he's a married man and his wife has the honor of my acquaintance and admiration."

"I can trust you, Jenny. Put on your stockings, and don't let's speak any more about a bad woman as is gone to her account."

"I'll put on my stockings, mother," said Gracie, shaking out those articles from the collapse that hinted at their having been very hastily cast off overnight, "but I can't promise the other thing, as there are two people at least that I must go and talk to about her this very afternoon. After rehearsal, says you, and you say the thing which is right, and you are in fact a very superior kind of old woman. Got any anchovies, mu-*ther?*"

"Go in and get dressed, will you? and I'll see about your breakfast. You was too late last night."

"Which I were, but if an idiotic British public likes a curtain to rise after half-past eleven o'clock, what's to be done, mum, but oblige our idiotic but generous malefactors? Talk to the manager, mum, don't scold me."

"I don't think I ever did, Jenny. Might have been better, if I had."

"Impossible, you old thing. Your child is an angel, and wants anchovies."

Wherewith Miss Gracie took herself and her light array out of the little drawing-room. Later in the day, and after the rehearsal she had spoken of, she might have been seen coming out at the stage-door accompanied by her friend Francis Beaumont.

"Nuisance, that girl," he said, as soon as they had turned into the street.

"Well, poor thing, she couldn't help it," said Grace Clare.

"Couldn't help getting married?—yes, she could—at least she might have waited until the burlesque was out, and set running. There's no consideration about the profession, as you call it. I always said so. Confound her."

"Nice bit of selfishness, that, Mr. Beaumont. You'd have had Fanny Holmes run the chance of losing a good match, for the sake of two scenes in your burlesque. I let you know that

if I get a good offer, I shall accept it, at any sacrifice of your lordship's interests."

"You, indeed! Who'd marry you?" said the author, laughing. "But I say, Grace, what a bore it is. That stick of a girl they put in this morning won't do at any price. She's downright ugly, and your best speech is a lot of compliments to her beauty."

"I think if I had a white wagon I could do something."

"A what?" asked Frank Beaumont.

"What?" laughed Grace Clare. "That's one of my words—or two of 'em—don't you know? Well, ignorance, we'll say cart blanch."

"Goose! But have you got any notion? I declare I can't think of any body that will do. Hang Fanny Holmes! she makes me quite savage."

"I have a notion, but I don't want to say any thing about it until I see. I mean that I think I know somebody; and if I can get her to do it, you could not do better than ask your manager's leave."

"But I should engage her myself without waiting for that. Who is she?"

"Let me see her before I tell."

"Will you go and see her now? Let me charter a cab for you? And then come and tell me. There's no time to lose, not a day."

"Where will you be in a couple of hours? I'm not coming to your club, mind that. I don't like being stared at."

"I know. I wasn't going to propose any thing so repulsive to your delicacy, Miss Clare. Come to my house."

"Mrs. Beaumont has no objection, I presume?"

"Nobody has objections in my house to any thing I like. Mrs. Beaumont admires you much. But you will not see Mrs. Beaumont, and you will see a white kid glove on the knocker."

"Oh, dear. I hadn't heard. Prince or princess?"

"The latter."

"I'm glad of that, as it will have its bringing-up from your wife, not you, which promises better for it. Go home and nurse your baby by all means, and wait till I come. I say, Frank, do you recollect the last time I called on you?"

"Quite well."

"That old woman's dead, that I got you to play the trick on. Have you seen it in the paper?"

"No, I've had no time for papers. Dead, is she? Well, that's a good thing."

"For her, do you mean?" demanded Grace.

"No," said Beaumont, slowly. "That is decidedly not what I mean. Well, never mind her, go about your business. Here's a nice Hansom, with an elegant white horse; shall I call him? Now then," he added, when he had handed Miss Clare into the cab, protecting her drapery from the wheel in a way that showed it was not the first time he had rendered that cavalier's service, "where shall I tell him to go?"

"Straight across the moon, and then to the left, till he comes to the equinoxious line," replied Miss Clare. "I'll tell him. Charing Cross first."

"Knows how to take care of herself, and very right too," said the author. "Had to dodge fellows who wanted her address, often enough, I dare say. Hard work for a pretty girl to keep herself steady," he added, and then burst into a hearty laugh. "I am actually talking like the father of a daughter. So that old hag's dead. I sent her into rough company, but not half so bad as her own. They tormented her, but they did her no harm. *Liberavi animam.*"

Meantime Miss Clare made the best of her way to the Hut.

Lucy was at home, and called out to Grace to come in, but there was petulance in the tone. And when Grace entered the studio, no work was going on, and a painted egg lay broken at the foot of the easel. Lucy herself had no smile for her visitor.

"It's a long time since I was here, Lucy, dear, but I have been so busy with rehearsals and dress-making, and one thing and another, that it has not been my fault. How are the children?"

"Well enough," said Mrs. Verner, with a short laugh. "I don't know why you should take the trouble to come all this way to see me. I'm a dull companion, I know, and you get better dinners at home than I can give you."

"You're out of sorts this morning, Lucy," said Grace, who was not there to be offended at trifles. "I want to talk you into good humor. But what makes you so melancholy?"

"I didn't know I was melancholy. Of course, I've got nothing to be melancholy about, my life is so gay, and I have so much companionship at home, and such pleasant memories to think over. It's a wonder I am not dancing from morning till night."

"Can you dance?" asked Grace.

"What a question! Never was a girl more fond of it, when I was a girl. When was that? Ten thousand years ago? Why, I have danced a hornpipe in this very room, among eggs of my own painting; before some other eggs came to addle. But my dancing days are over, and my singing days too, for that matter."

"You used to sing very nicely indeed."

"Yes, Gracie; but I've lost all my music."

"That could easily be got again," said Grace, who, being in earnest, was not acute to catch second meanings.

"I did not mean that," said Lucy Verner. "I didn't mean any thing except misery. I wish I was dead."

"Nonsense, Lucy, how can you talk such stuff? Young, and pretty, and clever—a great deal cleverer than I am, and I don't think small potatoes of myself!—and you talk about dying!

I'll tell you who is dead, though, and you won't be sorry to hear it."

We do not wish to hate Lucy, and if we set down the wild thought that rushed across her brain, we will add that it did not come from her heart.

"Not in her confinement?" she said, in a hollow voice,

"No—no—Lucy," said Grace, herself shocked. "And you don't mean it, and you don't wish it."

"No, I don't," replied Lucy. "Once I did, though," she added, with a half-defiant look. "But that is all over and gone. I should not change color if he were to walk into this room. All over and gone, Gracie; and my wonder now is, how I came to be so happy with him. I don't seem able to understand it now. Who's dead?"

"Faunt."

"Poor old beast! And drank herself to death, I suppose. She was all mops and brooms the last time she was here, dropping her papers about the room, and maundering."

"Nobody reads the papers but me, I think," said Gracie Clare, laughing. "You are the third person I've had to tell about it to-day."

"I read them once, nobody more regularly, when there was somebody to talk about what one read; but—" and she broke out into song, in a fresh and powerful voice, "but those days come not again, come not again, those days come not again."

"That's just capital," said Gracie, with honest admiration. "I'd give my ears to be able to send out the high notes as you do, and you out of practice too. You must have had a first-rate education, Lucy."

"No, I had not. But I learned a good many things afterward, and he let me have some masters. All thrown away—money, time, affection, every thing.

"'But the sooner it's over the sooner to sleep.'"

"The sooner what's over?" asked Grace.

"Life, child. And I can tell you that the sleep is nearer at hand than you think, or I either, perhaps. If I could only make up my mind about the children, and feel sure that they would be kindly treated, I would mix myself such a glass of wine as I never mixed before, and lay myself down to such a long sleep, Grace. Remember, when that happens, he is never to be told that it is his doing, his fault. It will not be. He has nothing to do with it, and he is not in my thoughts at all. It will be only from utter, sheer misery and weariness of the world."

"How well you said that," said Grace. "I don't mean that the sentiment is not nonsense, of which you ought to be ashamed, but you delivered it beautifully, and nearly made me cry."

"Not quite nonsense, dear. Can you read?" said Mrs. Verner, crossing to the fire-place.

"Yes, I believe so," said Grace, thrown off her head by the sudden question.

"Read that," said Mrs. Verner, holding toward her a very small vial, labelled.

"Nobody else shall," said Grace, taking the vial from her hand. "Are you not a downright wicked creature, Lucy, with those two angels of children, to think of leaving them to the chances and changes of a beastly cruel world? Yes, that's what it is, and I don't want to be polite. You deserve that they should be taken from you by a malignant fever, on the same day, and laid in the same grave."

"Grace, what words to a mother!"

"You're not a mother. You're a selfish and weak creature, letting yourself drop down like—like flat soda water."

The gods had not made the little girl poetical, and, meaning well, she took the first image that came to her. Lucy, who had a sense of humor, instantly broke into a laugh.

"So you are," said Grace, laughing also; "and the best of it is that you are not in earnest, and, I believe, have no more idea of taking that stuff, when you come to the scratch, than a cow has of jumping over the moon, nor so much. Now, just listen to me. You say that you can dance, and I know that you can sing, and that you can speak well, and you don't want to be told that you are very pretty. I have an offer for you. Come to our theatre, and play a charming little part in Beaumont & Fletcher's new burlesque."

"Me on the stage!" said Lucy, opening her famous great eyes to their full size.

"Yes, you. There's a fortune in store for you. You don't despise the stage, I hope?"

"I am a person to despise any thing, am I not?"

"That's not the way to look at it either. But never mind that now. What do you say? The part has been rehearsed, so I know all about it, and I tell you it is quite easy, but very telling. They'll put your own music into it."

"A woman's part?" faltered Lucy, hesitating.

"Yes. You had better begin with a woman's part, and have stronger things afterward. I don't know what sort of legs you have, but if they are like your arms, they should be good ones."

"Good enough," said Lucy, smiling.

"That means very good—so much the better for you. But this character is a she-priest—what do you call it?—and she wears long clothes, and I have seen the costume in the wardrobe—very nice indeed, white, gold fringes, and a belt of jewels, and the loveliest coronet, straight gold spikes, discovered by Fletcher in some absurd old book, but perfectly adorable. You would look divine in it. And then I must tell you that I am your lover, so that you would have to play nearly all the part with me, and that would give you confidence at the outset. Now, what do you say?"

Lucy Verner came out as Miss Cornwall, in honor of her native county. Her success was very decided, thanks to her piquant face and capital singing. She soon got on to better bus-

iness, and in due course amply vindicated the character which she had given to her legs. The critics say that she will be able to hold her own in a higher class of drama than burlesque, should the public taste ever recover from demoralization. In the mean time nothing can be prettier to look at than Miss Cornwall, and, some night, Magdalen, in a private box, will exchange looks, possibly smiles, with the mother of Mopes and the Dormouse. It is difficult for a man to prevent such complications, unless he marries an evangelical wife who does not attend theatres.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE OCTAGON CHORUS.

LIKE unto the Grecian Chorus, the men of the Octagon Club met and made their moral remarks upon the incidents of the closing drama. Three months had passed, however, since the vengeance descended on him who had contrived the plot against Magdalen Dormer.

"Ernest will be much disappointed," said Milwarden.

"I imagine it may be for the best," said Mangles. "Mrs. Dormer had gone through much mental and physical suffering. Had it lived, it might not have been healthy."

"Plenty of time before them," said Dalston.

And that was all the comment which the chorus thought it worth while to give to one part of an announcement in the First Column of that day.

"You will all be glad to hear, however," said Mangles, "that every thing else is going on as well as possible. I have a letter from Ernest this morning."

"He might have written to me, I think," said Walter Latrobe.

"Knowing the estimate you set upon a child, Walter," said Charley Launceston, "he perhaps could not trust himself with the subject. Why don't you marry, Walter, and not be dependent upon other people for the loan of children, like the woman that begs round the corner, and has a different batch every month?"

"I can not afford it," said Walter, simply.

"Pooh! I was only in joke," said Launceston, "don't speak gravely to me, because I can't bear that. I wasn't seriously proposing marriage to a man who declares he has only seven hundred a year, and has your absurd notions about not marrying money."

"Are they so absurd," said Tom Alford, "or at least, is the preaching them so absurd? Our evidence that Latrobe talked in that way would be quite enough to secure him safety on the ground of lunacy, if he ever committed a crime. He is perhaps meditating one. What is it, Walter?"

"Tom, your chaff is painfully lumbering. Some of the men here can do it sufferably, but the art is not yours, my son," responded Walter Latrobe. "Does Dormer send no messages to any of us, Mangles?"

"Had he done so, I should have delivered them with punctuality and dispatch, Colonel Latrobe," said Mr. Mangles. "What sort of a message did you expect? May I be allowed to guess that you wish an apology for not being secured as a godfather? Don't you think that the circumstances supply that apology? Be patient."

"I suspect that you have supplanted me, Mangles? What made you go down to Naybury, in that cold weather?"

"Frendship, Colonel, which was warm enough, with the aid of some wraps, rugs, a foot-warmer, and a pipe, to enable me to accomplish the journey in tolerable comfort."

"And you found every thing pleasant again?"

"Well, yes. There's nobody here, I think," he said, taking stock of the half-dozen or so of men who were smoking around him, "there's nobody here who is not friendly to Ernest Dormer, and who would not care to know that all that queer business is getting forgotten. Ah! here comes Penguin, who did yeoman's service, and deserves the oak-leaf coronet, and that we should all get up when he comes in."

"Understand that, Tommy Alford?" asked Milwarden. "Five to one you don't. Take it—no, it would be robbing you. Our classical friend alludes to the crown given by the Romans to him who had saved the life of a citizen—it was called the crown *ob civem servatum*. Write that down, and win a bet from some less instructed person."

"I can win a bet of that sort without your help, Milly. I think you might remember that," said Alford, laughing.

"He has you there," said Penguin, taking a large chair. "I heard of it—

> "'He woke to hear his sentry shriek,
> To hear the cry, the Greek, the Greek.'"

"My dear Penguin," said his bright-eyed brother-advocate, "I have often had the misfortune to hear you quote, but never with so much infelicity as now."

"Didn't he floor you with a bit of Greek, come?"

"If the respectable company thinks that an answer to my criticism, I have done. We were speaking of Naybury, Penguin."

"The less said about it the better; I mean about certain events, I think," said the Sergeant. "I would not go through that scene again for a thousand pounds. I see it in the night. It would not have been much, if I had been a mere by-stander, but to see a man who was just now boasting and defiant, and at whom one had one's self been thundering—and the next minute—down there, never to get up again. However, don't let us talk about it. Sorry to see there is no baby in the house, for the present, at all events."

"Yes," said Mangles, "it will be a great disappointment to that dear woman."

"You may call her that: By Jove, if I thought there was such another in the world, I am not sure that I would not search her out and marry her."

"I told all these parties, in the old days, my poor thoughts on the subject, and I was rather laughed at," said Mangles; "but now that I am supported by the evidence of a cynical old hard man, like Penguin, I suppose that I may be credited when I say that Dormer is the luckiest fellow in the world."

"You ought to except me," said Jemmy Rydon.

"What, you luckier than Dormer?"

"No, no. I mean that at the minute you showed me her picture, didn't I swear that every thing that had been said was a lie?"

"Yes, I believe I recollect some such logical inference on your part, James," replied Mangles, calmly. "'Here are in all two worthy voices gained.'"

"I was curious to know how the affair was taken in Naybury," said Penguin; "but in the first place I could not stay, and in the second, I don't suppose they would have said much to me. But that pretty woman, Henry Wigram's sister—I always forget her name, but it's one of the prize-ring names—"

"What's the good of that here, Penguin? As if you ever forget any thing—except yourself," said Milwarden.

"You flatter me," said Penguin. "But now I do remember, it was Mrs. De Gully. I was going to say that she behaved exceedingly well—better, in fact, than any woman was called on to behave in the circumstances, because she was running the risk of a quarrel with a rich brother. However, it is all for the best, and virtue has been rewarded, for I hear he is going to Nice, and takes her with him."

"She did behave well," said Mangles; "but men who do not understand the facts, and do not know Naybury society, will scarcely appreciate what she did. It is only fair to say that this lady, who had, of course, been in Henry Wigram's interest, and had been made a tool of to bring about much unpleasantness, came out boldly, apologized for her share in the business, and went about into society, proclaiming Mrs. Dormer's virtues, and menacing every body with the loss of her own patronage, if every atonement were not made to Marley House."

"And what was her patronage worth?" asked Dalston.

"Nothing, in itself, and a trifle less; but she had tremendous influence with that ancient and fish-like nobleman, old Mazagon, who is the great Mumbo-Jumbo there, and gives all sorts of parties. Mrs. De Gully looks over his lists, and she made a terrible example of one whole family, whom she caused the old boy to strike out, for crime and misdemeanor against the Dormers."

"Not that large female, with the two dreadful daughters?" asked Penguin.

"No," said Mangles; "that large female also behaved well. I am not exactly an evangelical person myself, but I am bound to bear witness to the fact, that when the class so called see their way to a duty, they 'do it with their might,' as the motto of one of their head men says. That large female's name is Bulliman, and I would not mention it if I had not something to say to her credit. She made herself master of the whole affair—"

"She looks as if she was in the habit of making herself master in most cases, and notoriously, I believe, she does so in the case of the respectable Bulliman," said Penguin. "I got that bit of Naybury gossip."

"You are *offensis sagax*, Mr. Sergeant," said Mangles. "The large female is the head of a society for talking scandal and making clothes for the poor. She summoned her parliament, informed them that they had all been quite wrong, herself included, in thinking that there was any thing against Mrs. Dormer, and having thus performed her own penance, she intimated, it seems, in the peculiar dialect of the sect, I don't pretend to reproduce it, that she should consider any body in a very bad way who did not call at Marley House. So, Mrs. De Gully for the worldlings, and Mrs. Bulliman for the pious, having come to the Dormer flag, you may say that it waves gallantly over Naybury."

"And that mad young parson, that took too much wine, and talked about his soul," said Dalston, really and unaffectedly speaking respectfully of the two crimes.

"Ah! that's another business," said Mangles, "and I don't profess to understand it. Ernest Dormer explained it to me in a way, but he did not care to talk about it much. That young parson was no more mad than you are, Doddy, though I make allowance for your astonishment at his venturing to say he had a soul—he did not, by the way, for he spoke of his child's soul, and bad books. Mr. Edward Grafton has succeeded his father in the rectory at Saxbury, and will probably marry an evangelical lady of riches, and go in for St. Calvin. It is less probable that I shall ask him here to dinner any more."

"The father retires, I suppose," said Penguin. "I think I heard something of the sort."

"You heard nothing of the sort, my dear Sergeant, and you know quite well what you did hear. It has nothing to do with any of us, I believe."

"What's the good of being mysterious?" said Henry Milwarden.

"Well," said Mangles, "I tell you what. We all talk a little freely here, and that's right enough. But without certain knowledge, I mean to mention no names for the future. We have had a little too much of that sort of thing."

"There's an Arcadian!" said Doddy Dalston. "Points a moral and adorns a tale, and actually preaches in a smoking-room."

"He has some good reason for holding his tongue in the present instance," said Launceston; "so we'll let him shelter himself behind his pleasing moralities."

"I have no such reason," said Sergeant Penguin. "I believe that the Rector of Saxbury has been compelled to break up his home and leave the country, in consequence of embarrassments occasioned by early indiscretions."

"He was a tutor at Cambridge," said Launceston, "but had left a long time before I went there, but I remembered his name, and there was an ugly story still sticking to it, which, following the lead of Samuel, henceforth Solomon Mangles, I shall not repeat, but I convey my meaning to sundry ears when I say that few things on the English stage are more effective than the water cave in the Colleen Bawn."

"Your memory is not bad," said Mangles, "but the family were friends of mine, in a sense, and he has paid bitterly for any thing done years ago."

"Well, I must say," said Charley Launceston, "that I am awfully pleased at what we have heard. All the scandal and rubbish has been cleared away, and Ernest Dormer and Mrs. Ernest are exactly where they ought to be, and I wish he would come into this room and be congratulated."

"He would not wish that," said Walter Latrobe. "But we'll get up a jolly house dinner for him the first time he comes to town."

"And nobody shall say any thing about souls, out of regard for Dalston," said Mangles.

"And no Greek shall be quoted, for the sake of Tommy Alford," said Milwarden.

"And no names shall be mentioned, as a homage to Mangles," said Doddy Dalston.

"And Horace Clyde shall be asked because he won't come," said Tom Alford.

"Beg your pardon," said Penguin, "he will come. A change has come over the spirit of his dream, whatever that means,—but the fact is he has lost all his money, and isn't half the humbug he was. While he was saving and thriving he was as mean as a foreigner—all foreigners are mean, you know, how can they help it, not being Englishmen?—but now his tin has all dropped down a tin mine, he has got free-handed and jolly. I dined with him and five others here last week, and there was not a man at the table who could do him any good, or help his ugly wife on in society."

"She is ugly," said Rydon, humbly, "and she's my cousin."

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, my dear fellow," said the Sergeant. "I could not know that. She is not at all like you. But if you feel hurt, pray take your revenge, and abuse all my cousins one after one according to seniority of age and priority of birth. It's no compliment to offer you the permission; I do it myself with great freedom, especially at Christmas-time."

"She is ugly," repeated Rydon, "but she has made him a very good wife, by tyrannizing over him with the utmost rigor. He would have gone down a dozen times but for his fear of her. It must have been without taking her orders that he has lost this money. I shan't inquire."

"Another convert to the silent system," said Milwarden.

"Yes, it will be a lively place in time," said Dalston. "Who will come and see Miss Cornwall as *Endymion*? Her lunatic song to the moon is the best thing I ever heard."

"Endymion was a person whom the moon, that is, Diana, fell in love with, Tom Alford," said Milwarden. "Did you ever hear of Keats?"

"Course I have. Who was talking of him, here, in this room, the other night, and saying how fond he was of flogging the boys at Eton, when he was master?"

"Oh, Tommy Alford, Tommy Alford, Oh!" parodied Penguin, amid the shout that went up.

"He knows better," said Launceston. "He wants to draw another bet. I think I'll go with you, Dalston. Will you come, Walter?"

"No," said Walter.

"Why, you used to be such a friend of the lady."

"I am her friend still, but I have seen her do lunatic business much better than she can do it in a burlesque, and I've had a part in it. I don't seem to care about the imitation."

"Our Walter speaks a trifle more bitterly than he is wont, and he never used to speak so of unprotected woman," said Milwarden.

"Unprotected! It is we who ought to be protected," said Walter Latrobe, walking out of the room.

"Another little mystery," said Penguin.

"Not quite," said Charley Launceston. "He's very mad about that girl having gone upon the stage, and though he isn't rich, as you heard and know, he offered her a lot of money to give up the engagement."

"And she wouldn't?"

"Why, don't you see she is acting every night? No, that first round of applause settled her business, and Walter was requested to mind his own."

"But I don't see why he should object," said Penguin. "That is to say, unless—" He stopped.

"Nothing of that kind," said Launceston, "and I don't expect to be believed when I tell you the real reason. Mind, I would not believe it myself, if any body told it to me, and I am quite ready to hear you jeer it down. Only I know Walter Latrobe. He was ready to make that sacrifice because he thought that Lucy ought to keep herself in privacy, and not run the risk of giving annoyance to Ernest's wife by becoming talked about."

"He must be mad, of course."

"Don Quixote was mad, but, by Heaven, Penguin, Don Quixote was a gentleman, and Walter Latrobe's another."

"Must have had a touch of sun-stroke in India," said Alford. "Put it all together—his love of children, his objection to marry for money, and his wanting to take more care of a lady than her own husband would take—poor old Walter! we shall hear something about him, some day."

They did hear something about him one day. They heard that he was in a steamer in the Mediterranean, and that a child on board sprang from its mother's arms, and went over a bulwark. They heard that before the mother's shriek had ceased, Walter Latrobe was in the water, and that the baby was saved—but that the valiant, loving, high-natured soldier received a blow from the paddle-wheel. He was gone where the children all smile, yet may have been the gladder for his coming.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

CONJUGIUM.

To the eyes of the world, and to their own hearts, Ernest and Magdalen seemed to have vanquished all enemies, including the deadliest of all, the menaced estrangement of affection.

It is pleasant to leave them happy—or with their happiness but slightly dimmed by the withholding of that which one of them had looked for with those sweetest yet strangest of hopes and fears that are known to early wifehood. It is pleasant to leave them thus—all doubts, all secrets done away, and each fully conscious of the other's love.

Assuredly their reunion was not one of those merely sensible and decorous arrangements which are adopted in pursuance of the excellent advice of friends, when there has been a misunderstanding, but neither party has any particular change to make — arrangements of which friends say, and with perfect propriety, that a better course could not have been taken, that the husband and wife have really a sincere liking for one another, that the nine days' talk will soon be over, and that they should soon begin to give little dinners. Let no slighting word be said of that worshipful British goddess, Common Sense. She is a bit of a Pagan deity, but her adorers manage to behave themselves so well, and to seem so content, that he who would pluck down her altar had best be sure that he can offer us a loftier cult.

After all, men and women do not want many scenes in the course of their lives. Some are never called upon the stage for active drama at all, but do their duty behind the canvas, and in the flies and in the wardrobe, and they are very comfortable. But most of us have a part to play once or twice. Still, we do not live for the sake of a few spasmodic conversations, a start or so, and a painful situation. The earlier in our history that we can get over these things, the better, as they will make less mark on our future.

Taking the case of husband and wife from the Philistine point of view, it is not a great deal that either demands from the other. Given the accessories, the accustomed living, the income inherited or earned with ordinary exertion (poverty is somebody's crime, and we speak of respectable persons), what does the wife require from the husband?

The courtesies of a gentleman—a man has no right to behave worse to a lady because she is his wife than he would to another — liberality in money matters, as much interference in household affairs as she desires, and no more—freedom to choose her own friends and make her own engagements, provided she commits no mistakes, against which she has a title to expect him to warn her—enough morality to make it utterly impossible for her to state that he is immoral—and, if she be a little exacting, a general desire to please her, and to be pleased by her; but though temper must be taught to comply with these conditions, some allowance must be made for temperament. There is a model husband.

He is so good that he is entitled to ask something more of his wife than her acceptance of his name, house and income.

The courtesies of a lady—a woman has no right to behave worse to a gentleman because he is her husband than she would to another—reasonable economy, or at all events, open demand of money vote, no secret extravagance;—such control of the household as secures him good dinners — admirable ones for his friends—and respectful servants; — sufficient self-command not to grow sentimental when any other gentleman than himself, any officer, tenor, oriental traveler, or other Peril becomes tender—an instinctive knowledge of the persons to be avoided and not-at-homed—a willingness to listen when he has any thing to say, and as much of the caressing manner, in private, as is acceptable, and in good taste. There is a model wife.

Much of those requirements, in both cases, is negative. Certainly it is so. Seven out of the ten commandments are negative. It would be a very good world indeed, if people would only leave off doing the things they ought not to do, and leave the other graces to follow in their proper places.

But a great deal of the above is positive, and it represents, not the scenes and situations of life, but long years. Let us rather say long days, of which the years are made up. Long evenings, when it is not well that man and woman should sit moodily gazing at one another, and thinking how much pleasanter some other companion—perhaps a certain companion—would be, and wondering why they married. Long journeys, when we are hunting for pleasure, and when it is not well to destroy it by showing want of interest in each other and in what interests the other. And it represents, too, what should be abidingly present, a desire that during the long partnership there shall be no grievances smouldering, no secrets festering, no injuries waiting to be repaid in kind. If we get all that is set out above, we find much merit, much self-command, much of homage to our goddess, Common Sense.

You have no right to look for all that, or much of it, in the hero or heroine of the novel, but do you get any thing that is much better? The anti-Philistine will answer with an indignant yes, but let us see.

Given that we marry to be comfortable, and not to be all our life recollecting, posing, attitudinizing, antagonizing, sympathizing, forgiving and forgetting, a sort of life that must greatly expedite our executor's receipt of our assurances upon it.

What kind of comfortableness will there be in the society of a gentleman who has had splendid passions for other ladies, single and married, and whom you, Madam, won at last, simply because your innocent manner and gentle voice soothed him at the instant that he was writhing under the faithlessness of that dark flashing-eyed beauty who, having promised to elope with him, eloped instead with the Italian marquis? You came as a healer, and you were very sweet, and you pretended not to understand his naughtiness, and you are his wife. But he was not thinking of you the other night in Paris, at the opera, when Norma was going on, and the marchioness was in a box opposite. They will meet in society one of these days, and then they will not talk about you, and your babies. All read very delightfully at the end of the novel, and we felt quite holy as he led you out into the starlight, and looking down on your lovely upturned face, said that exquisite thing out of Owen Meredith; but at home, Madam, when you and he have dined alone, and you have the headache and he is tired and cross, and does not like the agent's letter about the coming election—that splendid creature of passion will not be the right man in the right place.

And, Sir, that is a glorious woman whom you have won, and her ample brow (a mistake however) is superb, and her head is noble, and the fire which leaped into those magnificent eyes, and the gushing roll of that musical voice tell of a thousand secrets to be revealed only to him at whose feet she has humbly laid her heart. Nor will that wild cry with which she took you to her feverish bosom in the moonlight pass from your recollection. But wait till you get the gout, or some less aristocratic complaint, let us say the influenza, and it makes you deaf and peevish. Moreover, though you are a good deal of a hero now, and you sternly smote that half-tipsy, gigantic peer who insulted her, and made him reel down his ancestral stairs, you have a tendency to pursiness, and will be addicted to easy-chairs, and to think that the glorious woman might begin to take your homage for granted, and read Buckle instead of gazing on vacancy. You will find that voice has got some harsh notes in it. And while you are checking your wine bill, that glorious woman may be thinking you a very commonplace person, and making allowances for the gigantic peer, who was capable of a fierceness of adoration of which you never had an idea.

The Philistines may have the best of it, after all. Intense enjoyment is to be had out of "the crowded hour," but the long life of hours in which the sixty minutes are not crowded, but go on in orderly and dull fashion till the next hour relieves guard, is what the philosophic novelist has to provide for. He should either kill his people—and this the publishers object to—or he should give them a reasonable chance of living happily.

Our Ernest and Magdalen have to take their chances, and all those chances are not good. He had thought that he loved before he knew her, but it had been made very clear to him that he had not, and he will not be disturbed by any thing about his heart. We have tried to assure ourselves also that he will not be deprived of that sedulous attention to man's wishes and comforts which—for reasons—is not unfrequently bestowed in the Hut, and which is sometimes missed in the House. But there have been disturbing elements in the atmospheres in which both have lived. Luckily the two have never met and exchanged unkindnesses, there are no bitter words to pretend to forget, words that may be frozen up like those seized by Pantagruel, but just the sort that is likely to explode, as did his, upon the domestic hearth. This is good for those two, and it is good too that Magdalen has a sweet temper.

We may fairly hope that they will be happy.

Magdalen deserves to be so, for if she has faults, beyond that unfortunate superstitious idea, learned from those Papists, that we are bound to forgive our enemies, persecutors and slanderers, and try to turn their hearts, those faults have yet to be detected.

We do not say for a moment that Ernest deserves to be happy. To say so would be to make this an immoral book. He had lived an evil life, and he married without much love for his wife. But most men are much better off than they ought to be, and then, if he makes our darling Magdalen happy, we incline to forgive his early errors. Should she ever succeed in teaching him a little religion, it is not impossible that he may understand her better than he does now, in spite of all his belief and protestations. As it is, he goes to church with her—frequently. We can hardly leave them with a more satisfactory announcement.

The Club Chorus has saved us the necessity of adopting the old-fashioned but not disagreeable course of mentioning what has become of several of the persons who have grouped themselves, at greater or less distance, around our young friends, but there may be two or three of whom a few words may be said.

Mrs. De Gully, whom we said that nobody was to like, because she was not a good person, showed, as has been already reported, that she had some good instincts in her. The discovery that she had been showing civility to the person who had induced her brother to engage her in an unworthy service, had so incensed her, that for once in her life she postponed a pleasure to what she thought a duty, and instead of driving direct to Lord Mazagon's that day, she went off to a railway station, not that at Naybury, and sent up a telegram to Henry Wigram, informing him,

with a wonderful expenditure of words, that his friend had been with her and was at Marley House. The result of this act of devotion on her part was twofold. Wigram, not altogether sorry to be able to do one decent thing, sent notice to Sergeant Penguin. And Mrs. De Gully missed Lord Mazagon's lunch. We know what Penguin did, but it may be interesting to know that Lord Mazagon, who is the kindest of good-for-nothing old noblemen, made ample amends to her, by ordering a special refection, and by superintending it himself, and that Mrs. De Gully, flushed with the sense of self-sacrifice, made herself so exceptionally delightful, that his lordship left it in no degree doubtful to her that when she brought him news that the unworthy Captain De Gully lay with his last *alias* inscribed above him, the peerage should receive a new and beautiful ornament. Possibly Henry Wigram decided on a journey to Nice with some idea that his sister's interests might be thereby promoted. The Captain had been heard of as very much down indeed, and doing rascal service at certain gambling-houses in Marseilles. It would be unbrother-in-lawish not to furnish him with the means of obtaining as much cognac as might be good for the interests of society. But Wigram said nothing of this to Julia, and it is mentioned only to show that a good action is probably about to receive an early reward.

It is hard to justify by any of the more ordinary rules of human nature the course which at the last moment was adopted by Mrs. Sullage at the Rectory of Saxbury. She had pushed her revenge to the point of bringing the Rector to ruin, and making it necessary for him to endeavor to fly the country, and then she had stepped in and prevented the sacrifice by which Edward Grafton had sought to assist his parents. The natural, or shall we say the dramatic event to follow would be the Rector's despair and perhaps suicide, and a very excellent sensation effect might have been got out of a terrible situation —the mother shrieking before a locked door, and calling to her son to stand out of the way of a thin red stream that trickled from under it. But the fact was not so. Mrs. Sullage was not entirely unwomaned. For the Rector himself, she would have had neither forgiveness nor mercy, but the ardent love of Edward for his mother had touched the hard heart, and his furious words to Mrs. Sullage herself had confirmed a regard only to be understood by those who have studied what are absurdly called the contradictions in woman's nature. Patient, enduring, faithful Mrs. Grafton refused to leave her husband, and Mrs. Sullage called her adversary, the lawyer, into counsel. What instructions she gave him matters not, but Mr. Abbott was soon able to announce to Mr. and Mrs. Grafton that he had discovered another way of raising some money, and that after a couple of years in retirement, he doubted not to be able to invite them home again to the Rectory.

It was harder work to bring about the union between Edward Grafton and Miss Phœbe Bulliman.

Phœbe was not handsome, but a clergyman should know better than to make the sacred and typical alliance called marriage dependent on the accident of appearance; nor is it a common failing with the Anglican priest to do so, in circumstances like those in question. But Edward Grafton had memories which interfered with his worldly interests. Mrs. Sullage in vain declared to him that the arrangement already spoken of should be conditional on his securing the hand of Phœbe.

Then Mrs. Sullage showed her own hand.

Taking Edward into his own study, and using due precaution that his mother should not approach to overhear his story, she revealed to him that she was fully acquainted with all that had passed between him and the wretched old woman at the cottage—his first angry scene with Magdalen, his employing the spy upon Ernest Dormer, and all his subsequent humiliations, including his last cruel interview with the poor young wife.

"I have nothing to deny," said Edward Grafton. "I have been mad. But I shall not remain here, uncertain who knows or does not know these accursed things. I shall offer myself to the Church Missionary Society, and be sent away forever."

"The missionaries are avenged!" said Mrs. Sullage. "The man who wished that they were all eaten asks to be enrolled among them."

Even Edward laughed a hot, fierce, angry laugh at the poetical justice that had come upon him. But recovering his bitterness, he said—

"What was that hag to you?"

"Mother," said Mrs. Sullage, quietly.

Edward sat silently, wondering what he was to hear next, yet scarcely caring.

"Yes, at sixteen she was my mother. But that doesn't concern you. She was my spy upon your house and those in it. I might be away, but my interests were well looked after by that old creature, who never asked any thing from me but money, and who knew that I had nothing else for her except hate. Has she not been truthful and faithful? You have passed from her presence to mine, and little thought that your story had come to me first."

"And I have even sent her to the house—sent her to my mother."

"Yes, often, and to me, though you did not know that. But allow that I kept her under good control, when even in her drink, and with your father roaring and raging at her like a bull of Bashan, she never dared to tell him what I had forbidden her to know."

"You had no such regard for me."

"I had not then. I did not much care. Don't expect much forbearance from a woman who could stand by and hear her mother bellowed down—see her thrust, helpless, into the road in a storm."

"You tell me this for some reason."

"Yes, that you may know exactly what you have to expect if you refuse to obey me now. Marry Phœbe Bulliman, or every person in Naybury shall know your father's story and your own, and so shall your bishop, to say nothing of the Church Missionary Society."

Mrs. Sullage having shown her hand — he threw up his cards.

Had she proposed any one else to him, any one of more attraction—pretty Fanny Buxton, or any pleasant creature—he would perhaps have offered no resistance. But in the utter impossibility of his regarding Phœbe as a person to love, or in any way to be ordinarily tender over, the impossibility of the offer was merged. He offered.

Mrs. Bulliman ordered the false and profane priest from the house, having previously pointed out to him that he was but a money-hunter, addressing himself to an ugly girl because a beautiful one had rejected him, and he wanted carnal riches.

Mrs. Bulliman did nothing of the sort. That excellent woman considered several things, the first of which was that she had no voice in the matter, for Phœbe was of age, and her father could do what he liked with his money. Next, she was a good mother, and was delighted that Phœbe should marry at all, an event which had not been among the Bulliman probabilities. Also she was pleased that the luck came to Phœbe and not to Sophia, who was a more exemplary daughter, in a religious point of view, but whose temper was shown to her mother in a persistently detestable way. Phœbe was her America—she had rebelled and thrown off allegiance, but was always doing kind things to her under protest. Sophia was her Ireland —nominally loyal and submissive, but evermore troubling her with discontent and hard words. Lastly, Mrs. Bulliman, though so exceedingly good, was proud of an alliance with a good old family like that of the Rector of Saxbury. Mrs. Bulliman, when consulted, gave a smiling consent, and even had the motherly feeling to increase her plain child's triumph, by saying—

"Dear girl, your heart told you more truly than your mother what was in the ways of Providence. I remember telling you, somewhat harshly, but I meant it for the best, that Mr. Grafton did not care for you. You had read him better, my love."

That was hypocrisy, if you like, but it was intended to put Phœbe at her ease, and to prevent her dwelling too much on the thought that her mother knew well why Edward came wooing.

They were married, and Phœbe was happy. Her husband was certainly very undemonstrative in his affection, but Phœbe Grafton had not been much in the way of love-makers, and was perfectly satisfied. Mrs. Bulliman has been heard to say something about the dignity of a grandmother.

More to the purpose is it—more at least in the interest of the parish of Saxbury, that Edward Grafton, now at peace, is being a good deal weaned from worldliness. We have learned that he had higher and nobler ideas of his office than those he could have gained from his father, but the young clergyman's weakness of character and want of self-command led him into snares, and his conscience had no fair play amid the entanglements with which he had surrounded himself. Now that his lot was fixed, that he had little to fear, nothing to hope, he had leisure to think. And inasmuch as it was impossible for him to talk about love to his wife, and as she was but moderately informed in literature and the things appertaining, it occurred to him to talk to her on religion. Timid at first, for she greatly feared offending him with Dorcas dogmas, Phœbe, when she found him tolerant and interested, gently disclosed unto him the evangelical view of the highest subjects, and gave him much matter for reflection out of the treasury of her well-trained theological mind. Ere long he became heartily ashamed of the nonsense that he had talked to her in other days, but she was too good a wife to take the victory, and simply continued to offer him, when permitted, her beliefs touching the unknown. So much effect did she work that there was at one time danger of Edward Grafton's becoming most unduly Low Church, and fraternizing with the minister of an Ebenezer; but providentially his bishop, who really kept the eye of a vigilant over-looker on his diocese, came to Saxbury, and heard Edward preach. The fine voice which he inherited, and the bishop's compliments which it earned, kept the Reverend Mr. Grafton clerically-minded, and Phœbe, who instantly adored the bishop, resolved that her husband should do nothing to interfere with his lordship's yet more favorable notice. So Ebenezer was snubbed, but Edward Grafton does good work.

Mrs. Sullage was seen no more in Saxbury. Whether she was terribly shocked at the fate of the evil old woman whose child she was, is not on record, but she became a gainer by that event. The woman whose death had been falsely reported by Dudley, and whose name the ficticious tombstone bore, was seized with a fit of remorse at having cheated her old accomplice in a dark deed wherewith Dudley was mixed up, and on a real death-bed bequeathed to Mrs. Sullage a large hoard of ill-gotten money. Mrs. Sullage was not fastidious, and she accepted the legacy. It was in part composed of what had been withheld from Mrs. Faunt by treachery, and it was the price of complicity and secrecy in a fearful matter—yet the receiver clung to some rag of conscience, and perhaps did we know all about much conscience-money of which we daily read, we might have less surprise that this legacy was so prompted. Mrs. Sullage continues to instruct Mr. Abbott, and Edward, who, though growing decidedly pious, and not thinking money the main chance, has learned to consider that we

have no right to disregard any earthly good thing, and has occasional hope that her ideas of restitution may be carried still further. He has arrived, but by different means, at a similar belief, in reference to compensation, and the duty of accepting it, as that of our darling at Marley House.

One other person must be remembered, and that is our friend America Vetch, the composer. He grows more and more jealous every day. The reason for this is one which would have a contrary effect with the majority of husbands, but the mind of Vetch inherits, from his oriental ancestors, a subtlety which materially assists him in his vocation of the self-tormentor. Mrs. Vetch is not growing more handsome, or more likely to attract admirers. On the contrary, her ample charms are becoming very much too ample, and the irreverent caricaturist, of whom Vetch was so unduly afraid, has actually shown a picture of her which is not untruthful, but which would justify Vetch in avenging himself on a fiend who could depict Lauristina as a Mrs. Daniel Lambert. Mr. Vetch himself is not blind to his wife's loss of attractiveness, but the lesson he deduces from it is not that now she may safely be left to take care of herself (which indeed she could always do) and that he need no longer see a deadly enemy in each of Her Majesty's guardsmen, and all other constituents of the Gilded Youth of London. Vetch refines, and urges that as Lauristina sees her charms decay, and knows that she must expect less homage in future, she may in despair be ready to listen promptly to even careless vows, and to secure what passionate admiration she can while a chance is left. And so he watches the great fat thing more closely than ever, and makes himself miserable every day, and Lauristina knows it—knows that her hour of triumph outside her house is gone—but that inside it she can disturb one heart, if not with love, with something whose results amuse her amiable nature. As a certain small lad, home from school, when his big brothers and cousins were recounting their fights and valorous deeds, suddenly and exultingly chirped out—

"I can make one boy cry!"

Lauristina's life makes the worthy fellow miserable, but her demise would make him so miserable also that his friends scarcely like to rejoice that Mrs. Vetch, having nothing the matter with her, has recently taken to homœopathy. Meantime, and when he can address himself to his art, he composes very good music, and is at work on an oratorio to be called "Vashti," in which he hopes to touch his lady's imaginary heart by depicting the feelings of a good husband with an unkind wife, and he insults his friends when they ask after Esther.

Sir John Daw in the "Silent Woman" resolutely declares the King of Spain's Bible to be an author. Not regarding the *Vivisector* as a person, we may append a word touching that remarkable journal, and yet not be accused of lingering over our characters with that paternal fondness which is so intolerable to every body save one. The paper prospers well, and deserves to do so. It is one of the best of a class of journals which indicate that the cultivated mind in this country needs something more than had been supplied by journalism. Until within the last few years the English newspapers have thought for the reader. They have done it honestly, brilliantly, and far better than the vast mass of readers could do it for themselves, and it is most desirable that these should continue to be guided by their betters. Amateur thinkers usually come to grief, and at best are but amateurs. But the exceptional minds have demanded, in addition, a literature of inception and suggestion, and a training-school for those who will either openly or secretly influence the destinies of those who believe themselves guided by the talking sort. There is a thinking sort whose constituents are not amateurs, and through them and for them a new journalistic dynasty has been founded. It is no rival of the other; on the contrary, they work harmoniously, the new being the complement of the old. Both will remain necessary to the higher mind, while the ordinary mind will be amply and wholesomely provided for by one, the fearless, truthful, scholarly journalism which is as salt to the sea, and keeps society from becoming as "the gilded puddle the beasts would cough at." But the *Vivisector* and its cognati have other work to do, and that it is done, and done well, is shown in sundry catholic recognitions and sundry non-insular postulates which are already a religion lacking neither its priests nor—in a sense—its sacrifices. Glorious as have been the triumphs of physical engineering, they have had to deal with no difficulties like the abysses, the chasms, the fierce currents which the intellectual engineers are bridging; and if as yet, to the vulgar eye, many a bridge of theirs may seem but as Al Sirat, they know better things and glide fearlessly on. They ask no plaudit, no puff, they present one another with no testimonials, except at times a solved problem that condenses the faith or scepticism of a century, and they would know that they were losing strength if they found themselves becoming popular. But the poets have worked and gone, and these are their successors, these true Makers. In the eventide there shall be light.

Much too wise in their generation, however, are the owners of the *Vivisector* to make their daily bread dependent on the support of wise men only. They have not learned arithmetic to make that blunder. They do not affect a plenary inspiration. Those who would consult the higher oracles may do so in the *Vivisector's* columns, but there is also plenty of very good every-day preaching for a worshiper with an easy-sitting creed. In fact it is esteemed one of the very cleverest of journals by thousands who invariably pass over the articles which place it among the Makers. Whereby, the owners are clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously

every day, and yet they are doing more for Lazarus than he or his reviler wots of. Some of us, who have perhaps looked doubtfully and listened moodily on evil which forces itself on eye and ear, and have felt that "but to think is to be full of sorrow," have been helped by the writers of this school to maintain the belief that a day will dawn in which this Lazarus of a world will hear the words of power that came to the brother of her who sat still in the house.

THE END.